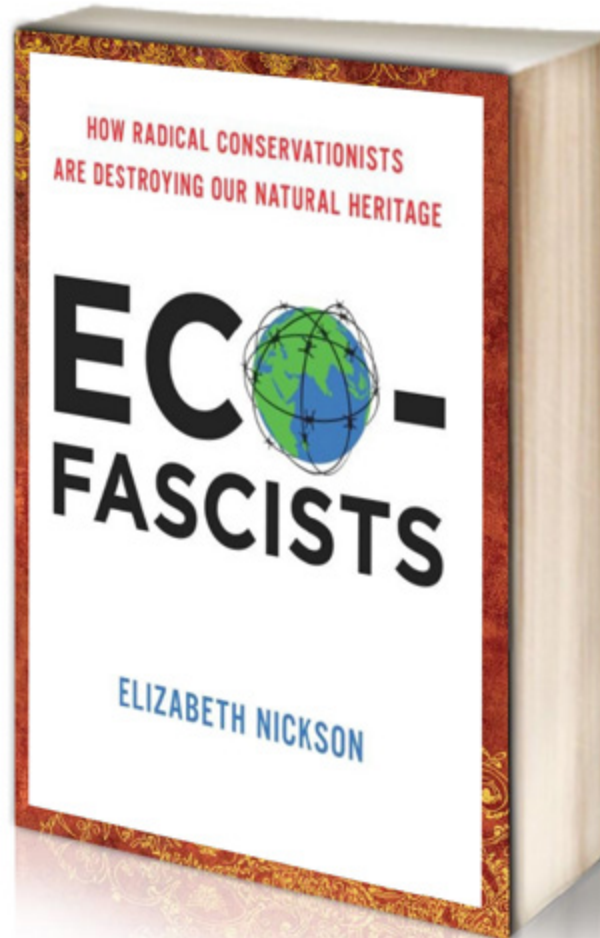


Reviews

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Eco-Fascists

A Review of

*Eco-Fascists: How Radical Conservationists
are Destroying our Natural Heritage*, by Elizabeth Nickson

Barry Cooper

Elizabeth Nickson can write. She developed her skills as a foreign correspondent for *Time* magazine and as a European bureau chief for *Life* magazine; later, she was a columnist for *The Globe and Mail* and the *National Post*. Nickson has even written a novel about a CIA mind-control program conducted in Montreal. Her latest book is *Eco-Fascists: How Radical Conservationists are Destroying our Natural Heritage*.¹ One review quite properly described it as a “game changer” because it clarifies so much of the moralizing nonsense spouted by contemporary conservationists, preservationists, enviros, sustainability advocates, and a host of other self-described improvers, progressives and green do-gooders.

Eco-Fascists deals with two related topics: (1) the difficulties Nickson experienced in securing permission to subdivide her property on Salt Spring Island and (2) the larger context of North American environmentalism within which this local process unfolded. The two are linked because the “incidents” she encountered on Salt Spring “came from a plan, one that has been carefully devised and put into place over the past thirty years.” Let us begin with the Salt Spring story.

By all normal standards, Elizabeth Nickson is an environmentalist. She lives on 16 acres of protected fields and streams and forest. She built a salmon-enhancement pond, and she is restoring two meadows, one is a former gravel pit and the other was overrun with invasive, impenetrable Scotch broom. Her house is made of dirt or more accurately, rammed earth, is geothermally heated and is without paint, drywall or solvents. She said it is “deep rose,” but it looked pink to me. One wall is covered floor to ceiling with a bookcase filled with books and has an old-fashioned ladder on a rail to reach them. She said it could be certified as a healthy house. And she is a country girl, having grown up in Loyalist country north of the Vermont-Quebec border. She told a story in the book about crossing Connecticut Avenue in Washington to the traffic island, kicking off her heels and planting her stockinged feet in the dry November grass just to feel the earth. “I need green as I need air and water,” she wrote:

I wilt when away from a forest and fields, as if part of me goes into eclipse. I grew up in the country, on a three-acre plot of land behind which lay a forest, manicured a hundred years before for late nineteenth-century promenaders. The once wide paths were overgrown, and the teahouse had collapsed, the brick pillars at its entrance pulled down by the weight of ivy. I never saw anyone else in that forest. A train track cut through it, the lake was on the other side of the tracks, and I had been transplanted from a city at the age of six to this place where hours of freedom reigned. Well, that was everything that mattered. I had friends, of course, and countless activities, but when I think of my childhood, I think of myself, alone in that forest. By the time I was fourteen, school whisked me away, then university, then a career, marriage, and all the shiny gift boxes of a supposedly successful life. And then one day, all of a sudden, none of it mattered anymore. What mattered was coming home.

Coming home meant purchasing 30 acres of forest on Salt Spring with a friend, Jim, who, 10 years later, having suffered a stroke, had to sell his share.

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This meant dividing their land and selling off her friend's property. Thus was Nickson drawn into the vortex created by the Islands Trust, an organ committed "to preserve and protect" most of the 400 islands in the Gulf of Georgia and Howe Sound between the mainland and Vancouver Island.

Salt Spring Island is part of the Pacific Northwest, the Vancouver-Seattle-Portland corridor that culturally, if not geographically, might include San Francisco as well. This is the region of the mind that gave us Greenpeace and Sea Shepherd, and then Earth First!, the Earth Liberation Army, the Earth Liberation Institute, the Earth Liberation Front, and countless other more-ephemeral groups. For Nickson, this was just a spiritual curiosity of the local culture until her land partner needed to pay his mounting medical bills.

The island itself is deservedly famous for its high-grade pot. Some of it grows in little planters under the power lines that bring electricity from Vancouver Island, safe from lethal spraying by RCMP helicopters; some grows in buried shipping containers. Years ago, speed boats used to run consignments through Boundary Pass and across Haro Strait to San Juan and Orcas Islands on the American side, rather like the booze shipped south during Prohibition. Tighter enforcement made possible by the use of hovercraft, as well as improved strains of cannabis grown in the United States have reduced U.S. dependency on foreign herb production and the contribution of this agricultural product to the island's prosperity. The relaxed way of life is still there, however, along with eco-witches who cast petals on the water during the full moon. Like Glendower in *Henry IV* (Part I, Act 3, s. 1, 52ff.), they can call spirits from the vasty deep in the form of killer whales summoned into Ganges Harbour.²

The NDP Government led by then premier Dave Barrett created the Islands Trust in 1974. It is effectively, though not legally, autonomous and has a budget of approximately \$7-million a year. Besides the Islands Trust, Salt Spring boasts half a dozen other land trusts. The Salt Spring Island Conservancy spends approximately a million dollars a year on "outreach" and "education" as well as on land acquisition. There is also the Land Trust Alliance British Columbia, conservancies on the other Gulf Islands, the Gulf Islands Alliance, and the Salt Spring Sustainability Institute, along with the British Columbia Ministry of Environment and other government agencies. The population of Salt Spring, under 10,000, is well served by, or burdened with, environmental protectors.

The Islands Trust and their associates practice what has been called fortress conservation, the objective of which is to lock down as much land as possible in order to ensure "natural regulation," which means no touching of anything, ever. In order for Nickson to subdivide her property, she had to get permission from the Islands Trust. The average title on a piece of land meant for one house is two pages long. Hers is 126 pages, with restrictions, covenants, easements, attachments and obligations. Eventually, all but four acres were restricted in one way or another, though after the property she owned jointly with Jim was legally divided, she still paid taxes on 16.5 acres.

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In order to build her pink dirt house on her property, she had to jump through 58 bureaucratic hoops including dozens of visits and conferences with officials, two citizen committees, public information meetings, public hearings, four stages of by-law drafts and approval by seven provincial departments. All of this activity made work for bureaucrats and cost her fees, upfront, for lawyers and consultants as well as for the privilege of filling out forms to feed to the bureaucrats.

It bears repeating that she was legally entitled to subdivide; it was her property, after all. Far more important, the conservation organs saw themselves as duty-bound to oppose her, and they were legally empowered to place restrictions on what could be done on what was left after the permit to subdivide was issued. The justification? To protect the environment. Their questionable assumption is that property owners do not protect their land. The unquestionable consequence was that Nickson's property rights were diminished when, by regulatory fiat, on most of her land she could do precisely nothing. In short, the cost of doing business on Salt Spring was that a large chunk of the land on which she lived was sequestered forever as a conservation area.

It would be a gross understatement to say that Nickson was curious about what had happened. "Reporters like me," she wrote, "are notoriously hard to domesticate." Therefore, instead of simply acquiescing in the decisions of the Islands Trust, she began an investigation. The question that intrigued her was not simply the extent of the bewildering regulations the Islands Trust administers. She was also curious about the immediate and evident consequences of the regulatory regime under the guidance of which she now lived.

First and most important: Every island under the administrative rule of the Islands Trust is facing a demographic catastrophe. Populations are aging and getting smaller because young families cannot cope with the regulatory asphyxiation. And remember, a generation ago, Salt Spring, as is true of many of the other islands, was a vibrant agricultural and logging community, a place where trees were cut down and turned into two-by-fours, where barns housed cows and were actually used rather than preserved as historic sites in need of restoration.³

Today, because Salt Spring is relatively expensive, owing to taxes and transportation costs, many locals rent their homes to visitors during the summer months and live in trailers in order to make ends meet. The enviros and conservationists disapprove of the practice because vacation home rentals encourage tourists and transient vacationers who throw loud parties. The visitors clog the sidewalks of Ganges, create too much sewage and shop too much. They are vulgar and commercial and do not sufficiently respect environmental values.

The answer? Criminalize vacation rentals. The result? More young families leave the island.

Conservers and enviros admit, of course, that removing land from the tax base means a decline in government services, because government revenue

“Every island under the administrative rule of the Islands Trust is facing a demographic catastrophe.”

to pay for them declines as well. In place of a tax base—from logging, for instance—there is a never-fulfilled promise of tourism and green jobs. The more observant among the enviros might speak of collateral damage when the tax base of a community disappears. On Salt Spring, most of them seem to be entirely oblivious. As Nickson pointed out, the island has become a retirement camp for successful enviros who have won their spurs in Montana, Oregon or the B.C. interior. They have been successful in “changing consumption patterns.” It works well enough when rural people, now much-impooverished refugees and displaced persons, do not consume much of anything. As Nickson said, the Islands Trust is in favour of sustaining everything but prosperity. But who benefits besides the lawyers and bureaucrats who grease the wheels of the process? Not the government and the productive taxpayers off-island who fund it. For them, the salaries of the administrators are just a cost. The enviros, however, get another save.

As Nickson peeled back layers of transparently sophistic justification, obfuscation and lies she found herself “implacably angry and opposed in a way [she] had never experienced.” This is why she chose the harsh title of her book. Most people, she admitted, view the environmentalist movement as “virtuous at best, foolish at worst.” It is not so, her reflections revealed. To see why anger, thymos, and a feeling of having been insulted and deceived is an entirely appropriate response, it is necessary to look at the wider context.

Let us start with a few interesting facts. In the United States, 30 per cent of the land area is formally and legally restricted as wilderness, forest reserve, park or monuments of various kinds. In Canada, because it is so much easier to do and because so much land is already Crown land, the percentage is much greater. About 3 per cent of Canada’s land mass has been logged, mined, ranched or farmed. In 2010, the PC government of Alberta put an area of boreal forest twice the size of Germany under strict conservation, except for a few very large pulp companies that made deals with the environmental NGOs or ENGOs (and the foundations that fund them) that oversee the protected land. Six percent of B.C. is privately held land. In February 2012, Jean Charest announced that an area the size of Quebec’s mother country, France, would be conserved in northern Quebec.

On the international scene in the developing world as a whole, 10 per cent of the land mass, more than the whole of Africa, is “protected.” In 2010, Goldman Sachs announced that 735,000 acres of Tierra del Fuego had been placed under conservation. The economy of that part of the world is based on oil and gas, sheep farming and ecotourism; much of the land set aside contains valuable resources and could be used productively. No longer.

Such changes did not occur by happenstance or accident. They were supported financially by the most august foundations in the world—Pew Charitable Trusts, Rockefeller, Heinz, Hewlett, The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation—as well as by the secretive and sinister Tides Foundation and the more hands-on

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organizations such as the Sierra Club, the David Suzuki Foundation and The Nature Conservancy (TNC). These organizations spend more than \$9-billion a year “selling fear.”⁴ This serious PR campaign is sustained by pseudoscience, much akin to the pseudoscience that accounts for anthropogenic global warming.

Before looking at this particular pseudoscience, it is important to note that the ambitions of these foundations and the enviro organizations they fund are practically boundless. Moreover, they are directly opposed to Canada’s national interest. For example, two San Francisco-based foundations created by the founders of Hewlett-Packard have paid approximately \$90-million to Aboriginal Indians and environmental groups in B.C. The Wilburforce Foundation of Seattle, which was created by Rose Letwin, wife of Gordon Letwin, the founding CTO of Microsoft, has given more than \$23-million to B.C. ENGOs and strongly supports the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y), which aims to protect a corridor of North America 3,200 km long and 500 km wide from mining and energy development. They say they want to protect wildlife; the effect is to stop any oil and gas development on 85 million acres, including large parts of B.C., Alberta and the Yukon. Similarly, the Hewlett-funded Canadian Boreal Initiative seeks to shut in 1.2 billion acres of the North—about 40 per cent of the country.

Now, among the enviros there may well be people who think that lynx and grizzlies are threatened. They are the kind of people Lenin called “useful idiots,” because they are oblivious of the larger agenda.⁵ By shutting down energy development in B.C. and Alberta, by bottling up export access to tidewater in the North and the West, and with it, access to Asian markets, these mostly U.S.-based foundations and their Canadian (useful idiot) accomplices cost the country roughly \$50-million a day. This has the effect of ensuring that the Canadian oil and gas industry has but one highly discounted market, the United States. One need not be a complete cynic to connect the dots between U.S. foundations and U.S. consumers.⁶

The consequence most germane to the present argument is that all this expenditure on conservation propaganda is supported by the same psychological attitude that we have already encountered on Salt Spring. The story goes like this: “Conservation impoverishes because it destroys the local tax base, you say? So what? I support conservation and give money to help the Sierra Club, the World Wildlife Fund, the David Suzuki Foundation, the Nature Conservancy, whatever, because I like to think of Wyoming or the Chilcotin or the Great Bear Rainforest as pristine. End of story.”

When the cows and the people are gone from Wyoming or the Great Bear Rainforest, it will be as pristine as Tierra del Fuego as managed by Goldman Sachs. Even if one is not seduced by the imagery of pristine wilderness, many people are sufficiently unhappy with the aesthetic of strip malls and ugly urban office towers that they willingly part with \$25 a month in the hopes of preserving somewhere what we think our grandparents had.

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Let us look closer at the coalface of how actual operations work. Here is an example: An ENGO takes control of the debt of a poor country in exchange for a tax receipt issued to the (usually) Western bank to which the debt is owed. The ENGO, now owning the debt of the poor country, offers to liquidate it in exchange for land that can then be conserved forever as pristine wilderness. This means that it is to be purged of human beings. New villages are promised. Healthcare is promised. Green ecotourism jobs are promised. Windmills and solar panels are promised. (Have we heard this before?) What we get are armed guards protecting the new wilderness park by keeping humans away from their former homes.⁷ So far, we in the rich countries have created approximately 20 million displaced persons in this way, which compares favourably with the 4 million created in the aftermath of World War II. The ENGOs involved? The sainted World Wildlife Fund, the blessed Nature Conservancy and the holy UN-affiliated Conservation International.⁸ The Nature Conservancy, for example, spent nearly \$8-billion between 2000 and 2008 to conserve and protect, which is to say, to control more than 100 million acres of the most biologically diverse land in the world, which contains trillions of dollars in natural resources—now removed forever from the local tax base. TNC has become “untouchable, almost impossible to criticize,” Nickson said. Yet, in 2003, *The Washington Post* ran a 22-part series that exposed their operations to some commonsensical scrutiny that, along with a United States Senate investigation, caused panic at TNC headquarters.

One of their best practices, for instance, was to acquire pristine land with tax-deductible donations and then to sell it back to its major donors (including some board members) for estates. In Balsam Mountain Preserve in South Carolina, investors paid \$10-million for land for which they received a \$20-million tax write-off. After being exposed, TNC said it made a mistake that would never recur.

To take another example: In the United States, the Bureau of Land Management, a federal agency that is part of the U.S. Department of the Interior, can go to a ranch to count cattle. It can then send the rancher a bill for this service. If he or she cannot pay, the Bureau of Land Management can take the cattle and sell them, and, thus, the land is emptied. As the old joke has it, the now-displaced ranchers could become cattle guards.

There is now a requirement in both Canada and the United States for buffers for creeks. These no-go areas can be up to a hundred feet wide on each side of the creek. They are enormously destructive, both economically and biologically. Coastal forests with buffered streams rot. Tree immune systems weaken. Trees are malnourished. The result is a reduction in both the number and the health of trees. More broadly, when old-growth forests are encouraged to develop, there are no trees cut, no thinning of the forest. In the Pacific Northwest where such bans are in place, 80 per cent of the trees develop root rot and become homes for beetles. The deer and elk disappear because the bush is too thick for them to move through and graze, and the deadfall is too high to climb. The beasts that feed on the ungulates, bear, cougar and wolf chiefly, then forage

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close to human settlement, resulting in lamb and calf losses. In the fall of 2012, a rancher south of Calgary reported to Fish and Wildlife that five grizzlies were roaming around his back yard. The enviros still insist that the grizzlies are threatened and endangered, not a threat and a danger.⁹

Whether the administration of conservation programs and wildlife protection is in the hands of ENGOs or the government, the strategy deployed against humans is the same: Regulation or “metastatic planning,” as Nickson called it, makes private land quasi-public, which lawyers call a taking of property rights. If the owners fight, it costs them dearly. Eventually, they either give up or go broke, and either way the conservation group gets to buy the land for pennies on the dollar of its proper and productive (former) value. Nickson said that at one point the process was akin to the action of a giant, psychotic five-year-old who moved into the neighbourhood and shut down the industry, pulled up the train tracks, broke the weirs and dams, introduced predators to kill livestock, methodically ruined family after family, forest after forest, ranch after ranch and then left, never to return, delighted at the march of progress. “*Evil* may be too strong a word for us modernists,” Nickson wrote, “but what else do you call an idea that ruins everything it touches?”

Good question.

One alternative to moral condemnation, however richly deserved it may be, was developed by Eric Voegelin: “second reality.” It is a term first developed by the Austrian and German novelists Robert Musil and Heimito von Doderer as part of their imaginative response to the Great War and to National Socialism. It refers to the result of an act of the imagination by which an imaginary or, more generally, an ideological postulate is taken to be real in a commonsensical way.¹⁰ In the present context, the second reality that justified the evil consequences that Nickson found so abhorrent was provided by a pseudoscience invented in 1978 at the University of California at San Diego: conservation biology—con biology for short.

Con biology rests on the assumption that humans are wreaking havoc on the natural world and that resources are both finite and decreasing. When the commonsensical evidence shows that “bounty, life expectancy, health, wealth, clean water and air are all *increasing*,” at least in countries served by democratic capitalism, the evidence is ignored in favour of maintaining the integrity of the imaginary second reality. Ancillary notions such as corporate greed and economic development can then be invoked as the source of threats to animals and plants. Until the invention of con biology, biologists were in the business of increasing the bounty of agricultural production, for example, not shutting it down. I can recall learning in school about the Brandon Research and Development Centre in Manitoba, which developed new strains of wheat for the short growing season on the Canadian prairies. That is, old-school biology respected and worked within the complexity and challenges of nature. Today, con biologists have replaced respect for complexity with explanations that, like con biology itself, are also constituents of a second reality.

“**Con biology rests on the assumption that humans are wreaking havoc on the natural world and that resources are both finite and decreasing.**”

The most thorough analysis, and one upon which Nickson relied, was provided by Alston Chase. His 1986 book *Playing God in Yellowstone: The Destruction of America's First National Park* was an “epiphany” because he had “unwittingly violated an unspoken taboo. Belief in the mysterious ecosystem was deemed an absolute requirement for those who called themselves environmentalists. The subject was simply not open to discussion.”¹¹ The old-time conservationists were hunters and fishermen; the new conservers, led by the con biologists, come equipped with pseudometaphysics, a political action plan and an enormous capacity for moral rectitude. They borrowed from ecology the notion of an ecosystem. It was derived from the new science of cybernetics, originally developed by Norbert Wiener to improve the accuracy of anti-aircraft artillery. Only now, the ecosystem was postulated to be a self-regulating whole. A few commonsensical scientists raised an obvious question: How big is a system? And they concluded that, since there is no way of testing for its existence or for its boundaries, by conventional criteria the whole notion is unscientific.

That is, the use of the term “ecosystem” was an exemplary instance of a second reality displacing the commonsense reality of traditional biology. The fact that the term was meaningless did not undermine its usefulness. Ecosystem integrity was simplified and popularized, initially by alarmist sloganeers such as Barry Commoner who proclaimed *urbi et orbi*: “[E]verything is connected to everything else.”¹² From this slogan, Commoner and those who believed him drew the conclusion that nature should be left alone because human meddling leads to ecosystem collapse. “Preservation thus requires isolating ecosystems from humanity.”¹³

This second reality can be expressed as a clear and simple dogma: “[S]ince ecosystem instability threatened humanity, biological diversity had to be protected by isolating threatened habitat from human interference.”¹⁴ When, within the second reality of an ecosystem, the emotions connected to nature worship were added, the result, particularly for activists, was called biocentrism. If all things are interconnected and everything depends on everything else, then all living things are equal to all other living things. Moreover, the interconnected whole, the ecosystem, was more important, significant and worthy of existence than any of its parts—including humans, of course. Ecosystems, according to the dogma, could be healthy or sick, that is, either balanced or not. Any human activity that introduced imbalance and instability was mistaken, dangerous and morally wrong.

This second reality of the ecosystem and its balance or imbalance captured the public imagination in North America the way race science did in Nazi Germany. Far-reaching public policies can be built on the flimsiest pseudoscience imaginable, as the Nazis demonstrated conclusively. In this sense, the U.S. *Endangered Species Act* and the Canadian *Species at Risk Act* are akin to Germany's Nuremberg laws. Initially, the citizens of both countries widely supported these North American legal instruments. Who would not feel good about saving the migratory whooping cranes? Nevertheless, when people discovered that, in the States, for example, this comprehensive land-use

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legislation covered newts and slugs as well, many started raising questions and expressing their reservations that by regulating human development through surveying and possibly protecting every creature that walks, crawls, or flies, they also were undertaking a serious erosion of property rights. In other words, the notion of an ecosystem provided eco-bureaucrats with the opportunity to manage just about everything. The appeal of the *libido dominandi*, the desire to dominate, as Saint Augustine said, is always there, especially when it is obscured by the uplifting sentiment that the regulators are doing Gaia's work.

Equilibrium notions had the further advantage of being expressible in mathematical formulae. This added to the patina of scientific respectability while adding precisely nothing to a genuine scientific understanding of nature. Just as with climate pseudoscience where models reign supreme, so too are models central to ecological pseudoscience. And just as climate pseudoscience ignored, say, the Ice Ages, so too did ecological pseudoscience overlook the obvious truth that these same catastrophic events, the Ice Ages, were incredibly disruptive, not equilibrating.

Chase summarized the second reality of the con biologists:

To loggers, mature forests were simply stands of decaying trees that had to be cut before they rotted away. To environmentalists they were 'ancient forests' embodying the permanence and constancy of nature. To many foresters, old-growth forests were 'biological deserts' containing few animals, such as elk and grouse, which they thought desirable. To environmentalists, they represented the biocentric ideal that confers equal importance on all living things, from elk to boring beetles.¹⁵

Economically and ecologically, saving old trees is akin to investing in old people and ignoring young ones, spending enormous sums on healthcare and ignoring education. Commonsensical silviculture would see old trees cut first to allow room for young trees to grow. Maintaining the natural state of the old forest preserved a kind of cathedral where nature could be worshipped properly, but the commonsensical notion that forests could be managed for human use as well as for the good of the trees was gone. The con biologists and the enviros considered humans to be not the custodians of the Earth but enemies of nature.

Chase pointed out a number of additional problems the con biologists managed to avoid by reasserting the importance of their second reality. For example:

If scholars could not locate ecosystems in the real world, if they could not distinguish human-caused extinctions from natural ones, if they did not know how many creatures were at risk, if they did not understand the meaning of the key words they used, if they knew next to nothing about the evolutionary requirements of the earth's inhabitants, then how could they save creatures at risk?

The answer they gave was: by preserving the ecosystem.¹⁶

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In commonsensereality, nature is not self-equilibrating, so it cannot be left alone. It is impossible to preserve pristine wilderness, however defined, without serious and extensive intervention. Nor does it make sense to talk of planetary health. The Earth may be healthy for dinosaurs or for humans, but not just healthy. The implication is obvious: One cannot preserve everything. On a smaller scale, one can manage a forest to enhance the deer population or to enhance the butterfly population, but either way demands a choice and human activity.

Given that the natural history of the planet consisted primarily of evolutionary turbulence, it is clear that natural conditions have never been static or equilibrated. None of the derived notions, such as old-growth forests, ever existed by themselves; they have always been part of a cycle. Yet, in the second reality imagined by the con biologists, old-growth forests have been invoked as the original starting point before humans, in the first instance, Indians, began managing the forests using fire, or cutting down trees for two-by-fours. In fact, there are no original conditions, not least of all because of wildfires. In commonsense reality, there never has been a forest primeval.

Traditional silviculturists and foresters measured the value of a forest in terms of its use to society. The New Foresters, devoted to con biology, who privileged old growth also favoured ecosystem health. Thus, wood production is to be subordinated to forest fitness. As the B.C. Ministry of Forests puts it, timber production is a “by-product” of forest management that is aimed at “sustaining biological diversity and maintaining long-term ecosystem health.”¹⁷

Consider the logic of combining into a single complex the second reality notions of ecosystem, biodiversity, biocentrism and balance for the formation of public policy. Since no one can determine what the boundaries of a self-sustaining ecosystem are, they are infinitely elastic and expandable. Whenever the life forms in any particular conservation area failed to stabilize, this was evidence that the ecosystem must be bigger than the existing conservation area. If global survival depended on balanced ecosystems, which in reality do not and never did exist, if healthy ecosystems maintained all their biodiversity (which is itself a highly contested term) in balance, then the appropriate human attitude must be despair, and the appropriate political response must be a strong central authority tasked with preventing disaster by protecting ecosystems from humans and so cure their despair.

Possibly the most famous and most misguided application of the con biology complex of second realities was focused on the northern spotted owl. The so-called research dealing with this bird was based on computer models. As Nickson said, these were “desktop extinctions,” not real ones. The policy consequences, however, were real and resulted in shutting down huge tracts of the Western United States, as old-growth habitat was apparently necessary to preserve this bird. In reality, there was no evidence that old trees were essential habitat for spotted northern spotted owls or that their numbers were declining. In fact, “no continental forest bird or mammal is recorded as having

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gone extinct from any cause” and certainly not from habitat loss.¹⁸ To meet this inconvenient fact, the Forest Service used the so-called Delphi approach, namely to ask oracles, the con biologists, for their opinions. If one selects the oracles carefully enough, especially if they receive research funds from the government or from enviro foundations, one can be confident of getting the desired results. Moreover, it is a lot easier than actually conducting research on the ground by actually counting the elusive birds.

When a few genuine scientists eventually got around to conducting an audit of the northern spotted owl populations and their habitat, it seemed they were reviving and as often as not were doing so in newer second- and third-growth forests. The reason is the Dusky-footed Wood Rat, which enjoys life in new forests. And the owls relish Dusky-footed Wood Rats.¹⁹

A few other real-world consequences of shutting down so much productive forest in the Pacific Northwest should be mentioned. Closing 100,000 acres of forests in North America led to the destruction of 1.53 million acres of lower grade Russian forests. Two-by-fours had to come from somewhere. As private landowners saw the effects of regulations, they accelerated their land-clearing harvests and went after inferior grades. The effect was similar to what then premier Ralph Klein, in a fit of candour for which he was famous and admired, said: Ranchers faced with a bureaucrat telling them to leave some habitat alone, without any compensation, because of burrowing owls, say, or swift foxes, would shoot, shovel and shut up. Given the opportunity, who would not?

Possibly the worst example of foreseeable but unintended consequences comes from fire suppression. I can recall as a kid seeing a large sign on the Hope-Princeton Highway in an area that had burned in a fire. It was a replica of a large cigarette suspended above the exhortation: “The One who Dropped it Should Have Been Hanged.” How the B.C. Forest Service knew the fire was caused by a dropped cigarette and not by lightning remains obscure. Fire suppression followed by the prohibition of logging, especially by ending clear-cutting, which is a human equivalent to a low-intensity fire, has set the stage for a series of what previously would have been a once-in-a-millennium cataclysmic event. In other words, seeking to halt change and preserve old-growth forests will have the effect of accelerating change. If you do not harvest timber, it dies and dries and increases the fuel load and burns so hot that it leaves the earth sterile for years. The death of wildlife and habitat destruction massively outweighs any loss resulting from ordinary timber harvests.

As far as the northern spotted owl campaign was concerned, the whole point was to stop logging. In reality, logging or not logging made no difference at all to the birds. It made a big difference to loggers, who are out of the forests and out of work. This is the same logic and the same psychology that was recently applied to inflame opposition in B.C. to the Northern Gateway Pipeline project. Of course, Northern Gateway involves risks, and, like all risks, they are manageable. However, pipeline opponents, many of whom are funded by those same U.S.-based foundations from far beyond the borders of B.C. or

Alberta, oppose any disturbance of the pristine B.C. ecosystem. Once again, an enviro in Montreal or New York can feel good knowing that in the pristine Great Bear Rainforest pristine salmon swim up pristine streams into the happy paws of pristine grizzlies. Normal, commonsensical people would call this living in a fantasy world, which is precisely what one expects from imaginatively embracing the second reality of ecosystems and the other elements of the complex.

What is to be done? Nickson raised Lenin's question at the end of her book. Like her opponents (or tormentors), Nickson advised us to think globally and act locally. The global aspect of her thinking has centred on her analysis of the North American context that has for so long legitimized the activities of the Islands Trust. It would be gratifying to report that Nickson's victory, if that is the correct term, was followed by a rollback of the power of the Trust. It is true that a particularly egregious pair of Trustees was removed, but the "green Taliban" as their opponents call them, are still there. In response to a column I wrote in the *Calgary Herald* on Nickson's travails, I received several e-mails from other island residents, often with correspondence attached that told essentially the same story, but without even the more or less happy ending that the landowner eventually could build a house.

There is one bit of good news to report. It applies to bureaucrats everywhere, whether in the public or the private sector: They do not like to be mocked. When, nevertheless, they act to protect some obscure life form such as the Furbish lousewort, a plant, or the more famous snail darter, an ugly minnow, when there is by any standard not enough known about the life form to have a clue if it is genuinely endangered, ridicule can be most effective. In the Salt Spring context, one of Nickson's allies, Jill Treewater, started taping the meetings of the Trust and posting the videos online. Many of the trustees objected, but to no avail. Many Salt Spring residents found the remarks of their trustee amusing and occasionally shocking.

The example of George Ehring, a long-time trustee, is particularly illustrative of what can be done. Ehring was a refugee from New Jersey who once worked as a legislative assistant for Bob Rae in his incarnation as the premier of Ontario. Ehring opposed any move for Salt Spring to become a municipality, which would have the effect of diluting the authority of the Trust. He persuaded the Trust to prohibit any outsider from speaking on the island without his permission, including a representative of the new municipal government of Bowen Island. An anonymous blogger, V, who described herself as a grandmother and a pensioner started the blog "Salt Spring Folly." Her first posting was of a famous Internet clip of Hitler berating his officers in his Berlin bunker in *Der Untergang* (*The Downfall*), a 2004 movie. In V's version, *Ehring's Bunker*, Hitler ranted on about how he destroyed the economy of Salt Spring, turned the island into a park for retired bureaucrats and rich ladies and would destroy all his

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ungrateful critics.²⁰ “The whole island fell about laughing and the countdown to the election began,” wrote Nickson. Ehring did not stand for re-election.

One consequence appeared a few weeks later. A week before a public hearing on creek-buffer regulations, the opponents, including Nickson, put up 250 signs, one on every major run-off ditch, of which there are many, proclaiming that setbacks meant no gardening, pruning, grass cutting, and indeed, no touching of 24,000 acres of the island. The signs were torn down and replaced, and then 600 people showed up at the hearing, some of whom chanted, “Dump the Trust.” The next day, the by-law was withdrawn. “We are the only jurisdiction anywhere in North America,” Nickson said, “that has turned back the hundred-foot buffer rule.” The ridicule accomplished by *Ehring’s Bunker* made possible the galvanizing of ordinary members of the Salt Spring public; it brought them to a meeting where they made their views very clear.

It was a start. No one who reads Nickson’s book can help but applaud this tiny recovery of common sense. Americans may have suffered more of the effects of this ideological movement—eco-fascism—than we have, but make no mistake, Canada and Canadians are very much in their sights.

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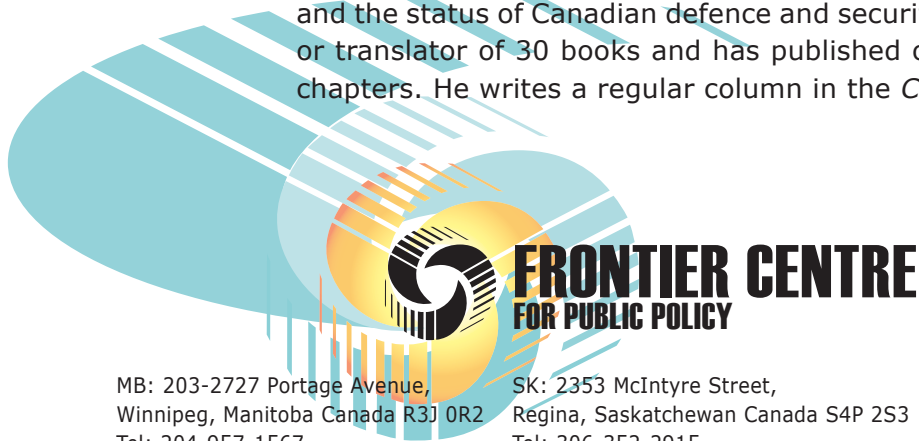
Endnotes

1. *Eco-Fascists: How Radical Conservationists are Destroying our Natural Heritage*, New York, Harper Collins, 2012, 367 pp. \$29.99.
2. Hotspur replied to Glendower: "Why, so can I [call them], or so can any man; But will they come when you do call them?" According to the residents of Ganges, the whales come when the eco-witches do call.
3. See the touching story by Elizabeth Nolan, "Burgoyne Park Barn Restoration Work gets Go-ahead," *Gulf Islands Driftwood*, Accessed October 17, 2012, p. 13.
4. On the Tides Foundation and its malign influence in B.C., including B.C. politics, see Vivian Krause, <http://fairquestions.typepad.com/files/vivian-tidescan-16june2012.pdf>. Accessed December 20, 2012.
5. See Sylvia LeRoy and Barry Cooper, "Off Limits: How Radical Environmentalists are Shutting Down Canada's National Parks," *Public Policy Sources*, 45 (Vancouver, Fraser Institute, 2000).
6. See Vivian Krause, "U.S. Greens Shut Down Canadian Oil," *Financial Post*. Available at <http://opinion.financialpost.com/2012/11/28/vivian-krause-u-s-greens-shut-down-canadian-oil/>. Accessed November 29, 2012.
7. See Mark Dowie, *Conservation Refugees: The Hundred-Year Conflict between Global Conservation and Native People*, (Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2009).
8. See Tim Bartley, "How Foundations Shape Social Movements: The Construction of an Organizational Field and the Rise of Forest Certification," *Social Problems*, 54:3 (2007), pp. 229-255. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, the estimate of 20 million displaced persons in the poor countries is matched by a similar number in North America. The Canadian data have not, as far as I know, been collected. A glance at the Ontario Smart Growth program and the many New Ruralism initiatives cannot be reassuring for the long-term stability of Canada's country population.
9. See Barry Cooper, Jason Hayes and Sylvia LeRoy, "Science Fiction or Science Fact? The Grizzly Biology behind Parks Canada's Management Models" (Fraser Institute, 2002).
10. See Voegelin, "The Eclipse of Reality," in *What is History? And Other Late Unpublished Writings*, ed., T.A. Hollweck and Paul Caringella; *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 28 (Baton Rouge, LSU Press, 1990), pp. 111-162. A more accessible account with direct reference to the Nazis is Voegelin's *Hitler and the Germans*, ed. and tr. Detlev Clemens and Brendan Purcell; *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 31 (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1999), pp. 239-256.
11. Chase, *In a Dark Wood: The Fight over Forests and the Rising Tyranny of Ecology*, (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1995), xii. See also *Playing God in Yellowstone: The Destruction of America's First National Park*, (New York, Harcourt and Brace, 1986).
12. Commoner, *The Closing Circle*, (New York, Bantam, 1971), pp. 29-30.
13. Commoner, *The Closing Circle*, p. 37.
14. Chase, *In a Dark Wood*, p. 104.
15. Chase, *In a Dark Wood*, p. 9.
16. Chase, *In a Dark Wood*, p. 112.
17. Doug Hopwood, *Principles and Practices of New Forestry*, (Victoria, Ministry of Forests, 1991), p. 1.
18. Willis Eschenbach, "Where are the Corpses?" Available at <http://wattsupwiththat.com/2010/01/04/where-are-the-corpses/>. Accessed November 15, 2012.
19. Chase, *In a Dark Wood*, p. 391.
20. *The Ehring Bunker*. Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDcrSJ2YObw. Accessed November 15, 2012.



About the author

Barry Cooper, a fourth generation Albertan, was educated at Shawnigan Lake School, the University of British Columbia and Duke University. He taught at Bishop's University, McGill, and York University before coming to the University of Calgary in 1981 where he has since taught classical and contemporary western political philosophy. Cooper's other area of continuing interest has been Canadian politics and public policy. Here he has brought the insights of political philosophers to bear on contemporary issues, including the place of technology and the media in Canada, the on-going debate over the constitutional status of Quebec, and the status of Canadian defence and security. He is the author, editor, or translator of 30 books and has published over 150 papers and book chapters. He writes a regular column in the *Calgary Herald*.



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By Dennis T. Avery

<http://www.fcpp.org/publication.php/3239>

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By Eric Merkley

<http://www.fcpp.org/publication.php/4190>