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Book Review: U.S. Energy and Environmental Interest Groups by Lettie Wenner

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U.S. ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL INTEREST GROUPS: INSTITUTIONAL PROFILES by Lettie McSpadden Wenner. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990. Pp. xxvii, 358. \$45.00.

As with great rivers, the sources that feed and direct major social movements are far more varied and complex than any simply-drawn lines on the political landscape. All sorts of tributaries, beneficial and destructive, propel or impede these movements, defining their strength, scope, and character in the process. To illuminate these contributing forces, therefore, is to provide insight into the movements themselves.

Interest groups have played a dominant if not determinative role in the "greening of America." Thus, that Lettie Wenner, a political scientist who has devoted much of her career to studying environmental issues (*The Environmental Decade* (1982) and *One Environment Under Law* (1976)), should publish a compendium describing such groups is an occasion for optimism. And, indeed, she does provide a useful reference tool for those seeking basic descriptions of these groups; yet, unfortunately, she does not offer a thorough or critical understanding of how they operate.

Wenner set out "to define the universe of groups that lobby in the fields of environmental and energy policy regardless of which side. . . they represent." To collect these, she culled lists created by others, selecting only those groups which had made frequent appearances before congressional hearings on proposed environmental and energy laws. In so doing, she concluded that there are three types of groups involved in this area: trade associations, public interest groups, and professional and governmental organizations.

Associations fall into the first category—business corporations and trade associations—primarily because they are organized around the profit principle. Beyond that, they are difficult to characterize since they represent different industries with disparate goals and strategies. The groups she lists range from the National Forest Products Association to the Wind Energy Association to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

The environmental interest group category, like business, is less a reflection of any shared purpose or plan than of a shared charitable tax status. In fact, the groups' philosophies are often in direct conflict with those of others. Among wildlife conserva-

tion groups, for example, we see hunter and angler clubs like Ducks Unlimited or National Wildlife Federation, whose primary goal is to maintain sufficient numbers of animals to hunt, as well as groups such as Defenders of Wildlife who believe in protecting nonhuman animals solely for their own value. The tactics of non-profit organizations are also divergent: compare the civil disobedience of Earth First! to the case sponsorship of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The final classification is also the smallest and most eclectic. Some of the professional, research, and governmental organizations included only work on environmental issues as incident to their broader concerns (e.g., American Medical Association, the League of Women Voters); while others have such issues as their main mission (e.g., National Association of Environmental Engineers).

The actual group biographies, numbering over 140, are not divided by group type but rather listed alphabetically by group name. Each account offers a concise description (1-2 pages) of organizational structure and resources, policy concerns, and tactics as well as an address. The profiles are largely a composite of responses to a survey drafted by Wenner and mailed to the groups; in addition, Wenner included information contained in group publications for those groups which did not respond to the survey. (The survey is reprinted in the Appendix.)

Wenner's means of data collection is probably the main limitation of the book, which, in essence, provides a simple one-stop source for group self-descriptions (though a more extensive source than *The Encyclopedia of Organizations*). By contrast, another volume in this Greenwood Press series—*Public Interest Law Groups: Institutional Profiles* by Karen O'Connor and Lee Epstein (1989)—includes analyses of group behavior based on interviews, cases, articles, and research beyond mail surveys and organizational publications. Given Wenner's background as a political scientist, it is disappointing that she does not critically evaluate the groups or reflect on the role they have played in the movement.

When I originally picked this book up, I hoped it would be an "Insider's Guide" to environmental and energy groups in the United States. It is not. It *is*, however, a list of the forces at play in the environmental social movement as well as a compilation of

basic information on these forces; thus, it can serve as a very helpful reference tool.

Tracey E. George