

**“TYPICALLY AMERICAN”: TRENDS IN THE
HISTORY OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS
AND POLICY IN THE MID-ATLANTIC REGION**

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Pursuing a regional approach to history puts twenty-first-century historians in the strange position of unconsciously echoing their nineteenth-century predecessors, though with differing goals. When historian Frederick Jackson Turner pronounced the Mid-Atlantic region “typically American,” he was of course intent upon divining an elusive national character, not currently a goal of historians. But Turner’s frontier thesis emphasized geography and region in a way that would still be recognizable to environmental historians today. For example, Turner’s observations concerning the Mid-Atlantic region hinged upon the physical geography of place, property ownership, and use of land. He noted that the Mid-Atlantic was a doorway for emigrants from all of Europe, who “entered by New York harbor” and were then intermixed; that the residents were “rooted in material prosperity” based on the land; and that the region, “with no barriers to shut out its frontiers from its settled regions, and with a system of connecting waterways,” was uniquely situated as a mechanism for the admixture of peoples. In this way, the Mid-Atlantic served

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as a microcosm of Turner's conception of the frontier as a churning machine that intermingled people from regions and nations to create an essentially American temperament.¹

Putting aside the intent behind Turner's "typically American" label, it is still possible to apply that judgment to the environmental history of the Mid-Atlantic. The region possesses the most significant concentration of urban centers in the nation, a long history of extractive industry, the legacies of early water-powered industrialization, and the remnants of some of the worst pollution disasters in American history. Along with those built environments, the region contains extensive forests with a long history of human management, complex river systems and bays, diverse colonial and pre-Columbian pasts, agricultural systems both past and current, and biological complexity in fields, forests, rivers, mountains, and shores. This diversity does not make the region unique—but it does mean that almost all of the major themes of environmental history appear in the places roughly bounded by the Atlantic, the 36th parallel, the western edge of the Appalachians, and the northern reaches of the Adirondacks.

The environmental matters covered in this article have long been under discussion by scholars, but the emergence of the Marcellus shale issue has served to refocus attention on these topics, some of which had seemed to slip at least slightly from the attention of the field of environmental history. I am particularly interested in two intertwined approaches: environmental history that details the politics, policy, and popular consciousness that shape decisionmaking; and environmental history that explores the impacts of those decisions on nature and landscapes. I refer to these approaches as the history of modern environmental *politics* and the history of human impact on *place*. The distinction here lies in what the scholar initially sets out to study: (a) a political process, philosophy, or force by which environmental decisions are made, or (b) a place, landscape, topic, or species that may be transformed by those decisions. Despite this attempt at differentiation, much of the environmental history of the region remains intertwined: no matter the locale, tugging at any thread in the weave of environmental issues eventually pulls on the entire mess. Whether by examining politicians, activists, legislatures, cities, markets, corporations, landscapes, forests, or fish, the histories examined in this essay demonstrate that studying environmental topics in the Mid-Atlantic region involves a bewildering welter of forces and effects, no matter the label.

Histories of Modern Environmental Politics

Multiple works published in the last decade have focused on individual politicians or historical actors with connections to the Mid-Atlantic, with the goal of explaining their connections to larger issues in environmental politics. Char Miller produced an early example of this with his work on Gifford Pinchot, arguing that the first chief of the U.S. Forest Service "was at the forefront of those seeking international agreements to check environmental devastation." From an outdoorsy rest cure in the Saranac Lake region of upstate New York to the managed forests of the family's "summer castle" in Milford, Pennsylvania, Miller continually links the peripatetic Pinchot to the Mid-Atlantic region.² Similarly, Thomas G. Smith's *Green Republican* and J. Brooks Flippen's *Conservative Conservationist* attempt to explain how Republican politics were once connected to the roots of environmentalism in a way rarely seen today. Flippen locates some of Republican attorney and EPA administrator Russell Train's conservationist impulses in a personal attachment to his farm on Maryland's Eastern Shore, while Smith connects Congressman John Saylor's political action to his personal experience of nature in western Pennsylvania.³

This attempt to interpret individual actors as bellwethers of larger events also frames recent studies of liberalism. A recent article by Peter Siskind on Nelson Rockefeller, for example, concludes that he "proved the most powerful and influential governor in the nation during the 1960s era, and New York continued in the vanguard of social policy experimentation." As such, "the unfolding of racial and environmental politics explored here reveal important facets of the evolution of and tensions within post-World War II American liberalism at the state and local level." In a similar vein, Adam M. Sowards's *The Environmental Justice* details the life and evolving environmental ethic of the politically active Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, complete with stories of his hearty and physically demanding outdoorsy life, and his mid-1950s public defense of the Chesapeake and Ohio Path in Maryland.⁴

It is obvious that many historians have chosen biographies of individual political figures as a means to narrate historical change in the politics of the environment, but there are a few scholars with the even larger goal of narrating transformations in philosophy and culture. Ben Minteer takes this approach when arguing that Benton MacKaye's cofounding of the Wilderness Society, his writings, and his commitment to creating the Appalachian Trail justifies elevating him into the company of great environmentalist

writers such as Lewis Mumford and Aldo Leopold. Similarly, Char Miller's immensely readable biography also argues that Pinchot's "conviction that the power of politics and government . . . must be employed to expand the benefits of democracy to those often excluded from civic life remains an article of faith among contemporary progressives." Along the same lines, Adam M. Sowards declares that in increasing public involvement in resource management, Justice Douglas and the larger conservation movement "democratized conservation [as] part of a larger reform process to open up the process of governing."⁵

These works demonstrate that using the examples of individual actors may certainly be a fruitful route for historians to portray larger stories of environmental politics, but the increasing availability of the archival records of environmental organizations also offers a new path to the same end. Frank Uekoetter's *The Age of Smoke* compares air pollution control policy in Germany and the United States, with much of the focus on Pittsburgh. Uekoetter ends up analyzing eras of cooperation and confrontation in policymaking, concluding that "the age of smoke emerges as even more crucial: never before or since was the nation-state so well suited to defining and enforcing codes of acceptable conduct and creating institutions to that effect." My own *Citizen Environmentalists* fits into this category. This project sifted newly available archival records to more closely examine Pittsburgh's environmental policy in the 1960s and 1970s.⁶ Dyana Furmansky's 2009 *Rosalie Edge, Hawk of Mercy*, demonstrates how new archival sources both create and complicate new narratives of movements history. "Before Rachel Carson, Rosalie Edge was the nation's premier example of how one person could wed science to public advocacy for the preservation and restoration of the wide natural world," writes Furmansky, but it was only through using letters and materials from the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Pennsylvania, uncatalogued before 1999, that the author could tell this story.⁷

Possibly the best example of a new scholarly focus on political activism within the narrative of a well-known topic comes from Elizabeth Blum's *Love Canal Revisited*, which re-examines the famous incident through archival records of a variety of environmental groups, producing a topical analysis distinct from that previously offered by the historical actors involved. Shifting the attention from the story of the individual activist displays the complexity of issues, ending with the argument that "environmental activism can be used to measure the acceptance of other social movements and general ideas about race, class, and gender by different groups over time." Along the way,

Blum calls our attention to the multiplicity and complexity of activist groups at Love Canal, extending the story from Lois Gibbs's Love Canal Homeowners Association to include the Ecumenical Task Force and the Concerned Love Canal Renters Association, and placing all of this in context with the contemporaneous group Women Strike for Peace. Re-examining a well-known story through newly available archival sources has yielded a very different history of environmental activism and its meaning.⁸

While neglected overall, activism as a subject of inquiry is still at the center of many historians' work, including Olga Polmar on New Jersey's toxic heritage and unequal distribution of risk, and Heather Fenyk and David Guston on citizen activism and wetlands in Maryland.⁹ Michael Egan has attempted to locate models for environmental activism in nineteenth-century New York's battles over regulating milk for public health purposes, starting with the undeniably engaging declaration that "this essay is a fraud." With the reader's attention firmly in hand, he explains that "this essay is a fraud, because it trades on the anachronistic notion that the urban reformers who pushed for quality control and public health were early environmentalists." Still, he continues, such a mental trick is useful in understanding the roots of activism.¹⁰ Explorations of environmental activism can occur in studies of a bewildering array of environmental issues: in thinking about the sources and shapes of popular environmental protest, scholars have explored topics ranging from activists' attempts to ban logging altogether in the Allegheny Forest, to reconstruction of the devastated Nine Mile Run in Pittsburgh, to activism and real estate in New York, and to the century-long battles over development and industry on the Hudson River.¹¹

Whether concerned with an individual political actor or a group of activists, the histories of involvement in environmental politics are highly dependent on the available sources. While new sources are prompting revision, a lack of archival documents has left obvious gaps in our narratives of twentieth-century environmentalism. For example, activism that grew in response to nuclear power and weapons seems to have been barely scratched, with Thomas Peterson's book on local activism in Allegany County, New York, a rare example that demonstrates further opportunity for work. It seems odd that antinuclear activism can be such a major part of European Green politics and yet receive fairly little attention in the United States, with several major clashes in the region remaining unexamined by historians using archival sources. For example, further research is needed on Ralph Nader's Critical Mass, a mid-1960s national antinuclear group based in Washington, DC.

Other organizations and nuclear plants remain unexamined, including the Indian River site on the Hudson, the Calvert Cliffs site in Maryland, and the formation of the Shad Alliance in opposition to the Shoreham site on Long Island. Calvert Cliffs seems particularly promising for future research, with late-1960s opposition to the site leading to an important 1971 federal case testing the boundaries of the new National Environmental Policy Act.¹²

Histories of Environmental Impacts on Place, Landscapes, and Regions

While the histories of environmental politics discussed in the previous section start with individual politicians, activists, political battles, or organizations, the works in the next category seem to focus on a place and subsequently examine the impact of changing policies on that subject. The works grouped below begin with a locale, landscape, flora, fauna, ecosystem, or region as a subject. By necessity, they also include explorations of the attempts of institutions, organizations, and governments to choose and pursue a certain path in relation to that subject.

There are a few trends among these works on the national level. For example, it has become standard practice for environmental historians to adopt a city or a region as a topic, with prominent examples dealing with Seattle, Boston, and St. Louis. The particular advantage here is the opportunity to narrate the long-term impacts of changing policy on a specific environment. Matthew Klinge's account of Seattle, for instance, shows the human alteration of land and water that latecomers to the city might assume were natural formations, while Michael Rawson demonstrates the surprising interplay of science, politics, and culture in fashioning both the city of Boston—built in large measure from landfill—and the expectations of its inhabitants.¹³

Another scholarly trend is the way that environmental historians have been pulled into newly invigorated discussions of the developing powers and responsibilities of governments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Following William Novak, many scholars outside of environmental history are describing a complex evolution of conflicting and competing forces within a multilayered and occasionally contradictory American state. These historians question the traditionally derided weakness of federal government in the nineteenth century. Many explore the foundations of private property, the police power to infringe upon that property, and alternative locations of

power within municipal, civic, or voluntary institutions.¹⁴ This has obvious implications for those who are writing histories of human impacts on the environment. A 2012 article by Jessica Wang that is ostensibly about dogs and animal control in New York City, for instance, actually ends up being an example of “one of innumerable areas of everyday public policy in which voluntary associations continue to wield police power, perform public functions, and exercise state authority alongside formally constituted governmental agencies.”¹⁵ These words could clearly apply to hundreds of different conservation agencies, sportsmen’s groups, county foresters, and state departments of natural resources.

Within the Mid-Atlantic, choosing to write about a region, watershed, or metropolitan area can similarly highlight the formation, modification, and impact of systematic government decision-making. *Discovering the Chesapeake*, for example, is a remarkable edited volume that brings an incredibly wide array of perspectives to bear on the complex ecology at the heart of the region. The editors of this work both struggle with and benefit from their interdisciplinarity, concluding that “the Chesapeake watershed story is a cautionary tale for those who would try to improve today’s environment on the basis of a very incomplete spatial or temporal understanding of the way the ecosystem really works.” After a long series of chapters on climate, forest, birds, fish, and gardens, William Cronon provides the concluding essay for the volume, worrying that “there are nearly as many ways of reconstructing the past landscapes of the Chesapeake as there are disciplines and scholars to study them.” The conclusion here highlights the difficulty of any government making assessments, predictions, or decisions based on an ever-changing understanding of the physical environment.¹⁶

Although on a smaller geographical scale than *Discovering the Chesapeake*, other recent works have attempted the same type of comprehensive analysis on the state and metropolitan levels, with an emphasis on government actions. Neil Maher’s *New Jersey’s Environments* focuses on both the natural environs and the better-known industrial landscapes of the region that together have resulted in an “ecological schizophrenia that makes New Jersey important for understanding the twentieth-century relationship between Americans and their natural world.” Similarly, Joel Tarr’s edited volume on Pittsburgh and its environs, *Devastation and Renewal*, emphasizes the “constant theme [of] the use of power to cause or avoid change; that is, who benefited from actions that produced environmental degradation and who bore the health and nuisance costs?” Focusing on race, class, and gender, Tarr’s work is also

accessible to scholars outside of the field of environmental history, and ends with a provocative essay from Sam Hays that all historians of environmental activism should read.¹⁷

Building on the insights of these edited volumes, David Stradling's *The Nature of New York* deserves special attention in the category of regional environmental histories. While it does not represent extensive new research, it is a persuasive argument for the importance of regional environmental synthesis, accessible to a general or undergraduate audience; it is quite possible that many states could be examined in this way, displacing traditional textbooks in undergraduate history courses. While still admitting that the "porousness of human boundaries" complicates using states as a category of analysis, Stradling argues that imaginary boundaries often are drawn along the physical boundaries of geographical features and, even more important, that "state policies have mattered in environmental history, and in New York especially so." Examining the state as a whole thus allows him to examine the specific and long-term physical impacts of state policy on forests, mining, wetlands, air pollution, and urban tenements.¹⁸

The management or preservation of forests, parks, and wildlands continues to be a popular topic for historians. Multiple historians have focused on the forests of the Mid-Atlantic region in the last decade, including Sara Gregg on Appalachia and forest management in Virginia, Geoffrey Buckley on Maryland and Baltimore, Ann Botshon on New York's highlands, David Stradling on the Catskills, Barbara McMartin on activism and the Adirondacks, and Joseph Speakman on the Civilian Conservation Corps in Penn's Woods.¹⁹ Many of these authors are concerned with forest management and preservation and the powers and limitations of organizations and agencies charged with those responsibilities. Gregg's project is apposite here, as she argues for the importance of land-use planning and New Deal policies in the early twentieth century underlying the state of Appalachian forests today. Also noteworthy is Karl Jacoby's contextualization of the "hidden history" of conservation in New York, an approach that leads to the observation that early "conservation also addressed how the interlocking human and natural communities of a given society were to be organized."²⁰ Beyond these forest histories, there is also significant work on the much-studied Central Park, the oft-overlooked Palisades Park of New York and New Jersey, and Rock Creek Park in the District of Columbia.²¹

The process by which private or public lands get remade into public-use trails has been particular noteworthy in exploring the interactions of state and

society. This is a subject that Edward Muller explores in his illustrated edited volume on the "Great Allegheny Passage Trail" that, while aimed at a popular audience, also includes Paul G. Wiegman's informative chapter on the political battles between citizens' groups, private property owners, and state and federal agencies. Similarly, Adam Sowards's *The Environmental Justice* includes an examination of the fight over transforming the former Chesapeake and Ohio Canal into a national park. This land-use struggle in the Potomac basin embodies a prominent theme for Mid-Atlantic history, as it "underscored the struggle to balance nature protection in places where population pressures were high." The debates over trails often reflect larger policy concerns, according to Sarah Mittlefehldt, who declares that examining the complex history of the Appalachian Trail "provides deeper understandings of the complex relationship between centralized state-based conservation efforts and decentralized grassroots social action."²²

The bodies of water that define the Mid-Atlantic seem to have drawn significant attention from scholars, particularly in attempts to explain current policy predicaments. Tom Andersen's *This Fine Piece of Water* takes this approach in exploring Long Island sound. Similarly, Christine Keisner's *The Oyster Question* and Roy T. Sawyer's *America's Wetland* examine the histories of Maryland's fisheries and tidewater Virginia, respectively. Recent battles between environmental groups, the fishing industry, and regulators are also of particular interest here, with Bruce Weaver's and David Grettler's separate works on the Delaware River as examples. Finally, turning to a more obvious example of industrial pollution, John H. Hartig's *Burning Rivers* includes New York's Buffalo River as one of its four case studies of the sensational occurrence of rivers actually catching fire.²³

In an intriguing essay that explores both the overlooked consequences of urban water policy and a regional understanding of urban environmental history, David Soll has recently built on a long tradition of historical writing about New York City's water needs. "Tracing the development of the city's water system from the late nineteenth century through the twenty-first century highlights the explanatory potential of a regional approach to urban history," Soll writes, echoing Raymond Mohl, William Cronon, and Joel Tarr.²⁴ Separately, Gerard Koepfel, Matthew Gandy, and Diane Galusha have all written about the city's unquenchable thirst, and the political, cultural, and environmental legacies of that demand.²⁵

Just as with its natural waterways, the Mid-Atlantic's extensive canal systems shaped its industrial and economic past and illustrate the impact

of political decisionmaking. Particularly of interest to historians of the environment are the ways in which canal-building in the nineteenth century had lasting, and often unintended, effects on a whole host of political, social, and economic issues. As Christopher Jones writes in an examination of eastern Pennsylvania's system of water transport, "canals created a new built environment that facilitated the emergence of a fossil fuel intensive society."²⁶ Standing in the shadow of George Rogers Taylor, both Gerard Koeppel and Peter L. Bernstein have written popularly situated and somewhat triumphalist books linking the construction of the Erie Canal with the formation of the modern American state. As Bernstein puts it, the history of the canal demonstrates "how a revolutionary technological network molded the triumph of the United States as a continental power and as a giant in the world economy." Both Koeppel and Bernstein focus on the outsized personalities of the private canal developers, leaving unexplored the roles of federal and state action in shaping the canal. This is disappointing, as an earlier history by Carol Sheriff seemed to indicate a renewed interest in a multiplicity of voices contributing to the debate over canal construction.²⁷ Indeed, as home to significant urban centers, the Mid-Atlantic would seem to offer many more transportation hubs for study, ranging from metropolitan rail to the complexities of establishing roads in the difficult and scenic terrain of the Hudson River Valley.²⁸

Much like waterways, air pollution is also of interest to historians studying a region that was once the center of America's industrial revolution and is still home to its largest urban populations. These historians often point out that the impact of air pollution is rarely just about the smoke; it also exposes the larger divisions and goals of society. As David Stradling writes about Progressive-era smoke reform, "by controlling the civilization rhetoric, middle- and upper-class urbanites could determine which aspects of urban America required reform, such as prostitution and smoke, and which aspects required none, such as the sanctity of private property and private profit." Scott Hamilton Dewey, James Longhurst, Lynn Page Snyder, Angela Gugliotta, Sherie Mershon, and Joel Tarr have all written on air pollution topics in New York City, Pittsburgh, and the Monongahela Valley.²⁹ Air pollution and its control is clearly a significant topic of research, but beyond New York and Pittsburgh there is less work on the topic, with the possible exception of Three Mile Island's release of radiation.³⁰

Moving from water to air to earth, the built environment has received significant attention in the region. The Mid-Atlantic was the location of the

first suburb, and the area is rife with possibilities for historical analysis of the genesis and impact of suburbanization. The topic is immensely complex: decisionmaking at the municipal, state, federal, and corporate levels all contributed to the creation and expansion of suburban housing, and suburbanization conceivably touches every historical subject of the late twentieth century. Adam Rome emphasized the significance of suburbanization in his 2001 work *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, working on the archetypal Levittown, New York. Here Rome locates a powerful tension between consumption, production, and a budding activism that resulted from major clashes. As he argues, "the postwar sprawl was a critical factor in a momentous shift in public policy," resulting in a delicate rebalancing of private and public good.³¹ Since Rome, many other scholars have completed projects examining suburbanization: Richardson Dilworth's 2005 study of suburbanization in New Jersey, *The Urban Origins of Suburban Autonomy*, is one of multiple works exploring suburbanization in that state.³² Angelique Bamberg has a book on Pittsburgh's Chatham Village, while Nicholas Bloom works on Reston, Virginia and Columbia, Maryland.³³ Returning to Rome's topic a decade later, Dianne Harris has compiled an exhaustive set of multidisciplinary perspectives on Levittown that explores the cultural meaning, racial biases, and class make-up of community development.³⁴

Just as land-use patterns above ground have environmental impacts, so do efforts to encourage or control subterranean development. The impacts of those mining and drilling policies on economies, populations, and landscapes are clearly an area of interest. The Mid-Atlantic has produced significant projects on extractive industry, with Brian Black's *Petrolia* and Kenneth Warren's *Wealth, Waste and Alienation* being excellent examples. *Petrolia* offers insight into the phenomenal impact on society and culture of an unexpected boom, noting that nineteenth-century oil discoveries "required that speculators, as well as the intrigued public, reconfigure their very view of the world, its resources, and how those resources should be managed and used."³⁵ More recently, Sean Patrick Adams has examined the actions of state legislatures in producing different outcomes in the coal-mining industries of nineteenth-century Pennsylvania and Virginia, convincingly arguing that "politics, rather than nature, shaped the evolution of America's mineral fuel economy."³⁶

The undeniable impacts of major extractive industry in these histories of oil, coal, and coke make it surprising that longwall coal mining has received so little coverage, hardly enough for this recurring and thorny

political problem. By comparison, mountaintop removal and surface mining in Appalachia have recently been the subjects of numerous books and dissertations, many attempting to situate the practices and local response in broader historical context. For example, while mostly preoccupied with a working-class land ethic that contrasts with middle-class environmentalism, Chad Montrie also notes that the region was a nursery for later opposition and policy formation: "It was surface mining in the Appalachian coalfields that prompted the first state action, spawned abolitionist sentiment, and sparked a campaign for federal prohibition of the practice." If surface mining and mountaintop removal had such major impact, is longwall mining as a method less visible to historians simply because it takes place underground?³⁷

Typically American

This review essay began with a reference to Frederick Jackson Turner and his debatable assertion that the Mid-Atlantic was the one "typically American" region in the nation. Contemporary historians are not consciously following Turner, of course, but there is an interesting echo of his study of politics and place in the works described here. As a regional historian, Turner prefigured many of the concerns of historians interested in environmental politics and policy: his thesis on the breakdown of sectionalism depended upon defining regions by physical and geographical aspects, along with the types of agriculture, industry, and resource extraction pursued by that region's populace and government. One hundred years after Turner, these topics once again dominate recent studies of the Mid-Atlantic region.

As noted throughout this review, significant opportunities for further work in the region remain. The environmental field's late twentieth-century discomfort with topics too close to the activism of the environmental movement has left untilled ground, explored by scholars in environmental justice, geography, or political history, but avoided by environmental historians. As such, there are important gaps in the literature related to histories of environmental organizations and activism. The Storm King controversy, the Three Mile Island crisis, and the protests against the Shoreham nuclear power plant, in particular, deserve more histories told through archival sources, and current disputes about Marcellus Shale fracking and the location of wind turbines begs for legal histories of scenic land disputes in New York and Pennsylvania. Additional work on the history of antinuclear activism is

likely, as new permits have been issued in 2012 for the first nuclear plants to be built in the United States since Three Mile Island, inauspiciously coming immediately after Japan's tsunami has prompted other western nations to retreat from nuclear power.³⁸

A number of specific landscapes also seem at least partly unexplored by environmental scholars. Surely Baltimore's harbor has a story as complex as Boston's, the Hudson has as many stories to tell as the Mississippi, the growing metropolitan corridor of the Eastern seaboard deserves a regional analysis, and the subject of longwall mining could be as instructive as mountaintop removal. The transnational reduction of sulfur dioxide emitted from coal-fired power plants impacted the forests, waterways, and energy production of the region for a century, and acid rain rose to international attention in the 1980s and 1990s, but the subject has not yet been explored through archival sources. For that matter, interest in the environmental impact of the Cold War could be profitably turned toward the Newport News shipyard, Fort Meade in Maryland, Langley's collection of bases in Virginia, and even more mysterious sites in the area.³⁹

In works on the Mid-Atlantic, and environmental policy in general, there also appears to be a lack of focus on intermediate policy institutions and mechanisms between the small scale of the individual city or park and the large scale of federal agencies. David Stradling's *The Nature of New York* is an interesting exception here, and possibly points the way to a new direction for environmental policy. This type of work appeals to a larger audience while providing fodder for comparisons of different legislative approaches, environmental philosophies, or agency implementation between states and within regions. There is still much work to be done at this intermediate level of interacting governments, as evidenced by recent work portraying the complexities of local, state, and federal policy interaction. Such work would fit with the current projects of many historians, both from within and beyond environmental history, who are engaged in various aspects of the "myth of the weak American state" debate.⁴⁰

Beyond these concerns, the larger matter of the significance of the environmental movements of the twentieth century requires additional inquiry. The historiographical debate here is over whether the rise of modern environmentalism had any significant impact on the course of history. In the recently published *The Turning Points of Environmental History*, several historians question the significance of an environmental moment. For example, Frank Uekoetter reflects upon the difficulties of bringing scientific

knowledge to bear on policy decisionmaking and wonders whether “the ‘great environmental awakening’ may one day look more like a ‘great deception.’”⁴¹ In the same volume, Jens Ivo Engels declares while “the ecological turn will therefore serve as an important landmark . . . [it] never was influential enough to serve as a basis for an ‘ecological era’ in the history of modern societies, despite the hopes of many.”⁴² At the polar opposite of this claim, Adam Rome argues that the environmental movement, and Earth Day in particular, was a transformative event: “By giving tens of thousands of speakers and organizers a chance to make a difference, Earth Day nurtured a generation of activists, and more.”⁴³ This is a significant, and obviously testable, hypothesis: did any of the political or cultural movements to temper human action in relation to their surroundings demonstrably change the course of human history, or are the forces of technology, energy use, capitalism, and long-standing philosophies of property ownership largely unaffected? Reduced very nearly *ad absurdum*, the question becomes: did environmentalism matter?

The Mid-Atlantic might be an excellent place to test any answer to these questions, and it is likely that environmental historians will be working in the region for some time to come. Environmental crisis, never too far away, always serves to refocus our interest in a history that explores the foundations and preconditions of that crisis, and while Marcellus shale is our current motivation, the next crisis is surely just around the corner. Combined with trends in the nature of archival acquisitions and a renewed interest in environmental activism, this means that the history of recent environmental politics and the physical impacts of policy is growing into a more visible portion of published research in environmental history, and will most likely continue to grow in the future.

NOTES

This essay owes much to the contributions of Allen Dieterich-Ward, who originally proposed the idea and shaped subsequent drafts.

1. Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1921), 27–28.
2. Char Miller, *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2001); see also V. Alaric Sample and Char Miller, “A Transformative Place: Grey Towers and the Evolution of American Conservationism,” *Journal of Forestry* 103 (July/August 2005): 237–40; Char Miller, “When Elephants Were Green: Gifford Pinchot, the GOP, and the Conservation Movement,” *Theodore Roosevelt Association Journal* 28 (Fall 2007): 12–24.

3. Thomas G. Smith, *Green Republican: John Saylor and the Preservation of America's Wilderness* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006); J. Brooks Flippin, *Conservative Conservationist: Russell E. Train and the Emergence of American Environmentalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 6.
4. Peter Siskind, "Shades of Black and Green: The Making of Racial and Environmental Liberalism in Nelson Rockefeller's New York," *Journal of Urban History* 34 (2008): 262; Adam M. Sowards, *The Environmental Justice: William O. Douglas and American Conservation* (Corvallis: University of Oregon Press, 2009); Geoffrey L. Buckley and J. Morgan Grove, "Sowing the Seeds of Forest Conservation: Fred Besley and the Maryland Story, 1906–1923," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 96 (Fall 2001): 303–27; Buckley, *America's Conservation Impulse: A Century of Saving Trees in the Old Line State* (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago, 2010).
5. Ben A. Minteer, *The Landscape of Reform: Civic Pragmatism and Environmental Thought in America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 4–5; Miller, *Gifford Pinchot*, 12; Sowards, *The Environmental Justice*, 6.
6. Frank Uekoetter, *The Age of Smoke: Environmental Policy in Germany and the United States, 1880–1970* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 5; James Longhurst, *Citizen Environmentalists* (Medford, MA: Tufts University Press, 2010); Robert R. Gioielli, "Hard Asphalt and Heavy Metals: Urban Environmentalism in Postwar America" (PhD diss., University of Cincinnati, 2008). For more on the role of new archival sources paving the way for environmental histories, see my essay on the topic in this volume.
7. Dyana Z. Furmansky, *Rosalie Edge, Hawk of Mercy: The Activist Who Saved Nature from the Conservationists* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009).
8. Elizabeth Blum, *Love Canal Revisited: Race, Class, and Gender in Environmental Activism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 5.
9. Olga Pomar, "Toxic Racism on a New Jersey Waterfront," in *The Quest for Environmental Justice: Human Rights and the Politics of Pollution*, ed. Robert D. Bullard (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, University of California Press, 2005), 125–41; Heather Fenyk and David H. Guston, "Citizen Expertise and Citizen Action in the Creation of the Freshwater Wetlands Protection Act," in *New Jersey's Environments: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. Neil M. Maher (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 68–89.
10. Michael Egan, "Organizing Environmental Protest: Swill Milk and Social Activism in Nineteenth-Century New York City," in *Natural Protest: Essays on the History of American Environmentalism*, ed. Egan and Jeff Crane (New York: Routledge, 2009), 39.
11. Samuel A. MacDonald, *The Agony of an American Wilderness: Loggers, Environmentalists, and the Struggle for Control of a Forgotten Forest* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005); Peter Harnik, "Nine Mile Run: In Pittsburgh, Activists Bring a Biologically Dead Stream Back to Life," *Landscape Architecture* 97, no. 11 (2007): 62–71; Tom Angotti, *New York for Sale: Community Planning Confronts Global Real Estate* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008); Frances F. Dunwell, *The Hudson: America's River* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).
12. Peterson's is a somewhat journalistic approach, with reconstructed dialogue. Thomas V. Peterson, *Linked Arms: A Rural Community Resists Nuclear Waste* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002); cf. Bill Heller, *A Good Day Has No Rain: The Truth about How Nuclear Test Fallout Contaminated*

- Upstate New York* (Albany, NY: Whitson, 2003); Jerry Jenkins, Karen Roy, Charles Driscoll, and Christopher Buerkett, *Acid Rain in the Adirondacks: An Environmental History* (Ithaca, NY: Comstock, 2007). On Calvert Cliffs, see *Calvert Cliffs Coordinating Committee v. United States Atomic Energy Commission*, 449 F. 2d 1109—Court of Appeals, District of Columbia Circuit 1971. Of course, historians are not the only ones taking a new look at the topic of environments and activism. See for example, Julie Sze, *Noxious New York: The Racial Politics of Urban Health and Environmental Justice* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007); Tom Belton, *Protecting New Jersey's Environment: From Cancer Alley to the New Garden State* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010).
13. Matthew Klinge, *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); Michael Rawson, *Eden on the Charles: The Making of Boston* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). There is a long list of these types of works on cities outside the region; the comparatively few describing the Mid-Atlantic are described below. A predecessor of many of these works was the special environmental history issue of *Pennsylvania History* in autumn 1999.
 14. William J. Novak, "The Myth of the 'Weak' American State," *American Historical Review* 113 (2008): 752–72, especially 758–59.
 15. Jessica Wang, "Dogs and the Making of the American State: Voluntary Association, State Power, and the Politics of Animal Control in New York City, 1850–1920," *Journal of American History* 98 (2012): 999.
 16. Philip D. Curtin, Grace Somers Brush, and George Wescott Fisher, eds., *Discovering the Chesapeake: The History of an Ecosystem* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), xxii, 357.
 17. Neil Maher, ed., *New Jersey's Environments: Past, Present and Future* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 2; Joel A. Tarr, ed., *Devastation and Renewal: An Environmental History of Pittsburgh and Its Region* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 9.
 18. David Stradling, *The Nature of New York: An Environmental History of the Empire State* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 7–8. For a less comprehensive but interesting state-level approach emphasizing legislative action, see Margaret T. Peters, *Conserving the Commonwealth: The Early Years of the Environmental Movement in Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008).
 19. Sara M. Gregg, *Managing the Mountains: Land Use Planning, the New Deal, and the Creation of a Federal Landscape in Appalachia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), x; Buckley, *America's Conservation Impulse*; Ann Botshon, *Saving Sterling Forest: The Epic Struggle to Preserve New York's Highlands* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007); David Stradling, *Making Mountains: New York City and the Catskills* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007); Barbara McMartin, *Perspectives on the Adirondacks: A Thirty-Year Struggle by People Protecting Their Treasure* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002); Joseph M. Speakman, *At Work in Penn's Woods: The Civilian Conservation Corps in Pennsylvania* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006); Peter Linehan, "Saving Penn's Woods: Deforestation and Reforestation in Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Legacies* 10 (May 2010): 20–25; Hugh O. Canham, "Hemlock and Hide: The Tanbark Industry in Old New York," *Northern Woodlands* 18 (Summer 2011): 36–41.
 20. Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 5.
 21. Stephen Germic, *American Green: Class, Crisis, and the Deployment of Nature in Central Park, Yosemite, and Yellowstone* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001); Robert O. Binnewies, *Palisades: 100,000*

- Acres in 100 Years* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001); Gail Spilsbury, *Rock Creek Park* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).
22. Edward K. Muller, *An Uncommon Passage: Traveling through History on the Great Allegheny Passage Trail* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009); Sowards, *The Environmental Justice*, 102; Sarah Mittlefehldt, "The People's Path: Conflict and Cooperation in the Acquisition of the Appalachian Trail," *Environmental History* 15 (2010): 643. See also Silas Chamberlin, "'To Ensure Permanency': Expanding and Protecting Hiking Opportunities in Twentieth-Century Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania History* 77 (Spring 2010): 193–216.
 23. Tom Andersen, *This Fine Piece of Water: An Environmental History of Long Island Sound* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Christine Keisner, *The Oyster Question: Scientists, Watermen, and the Maryland Chesapeake Bay since 1880* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010); Roy T. Sawyer, *America's Wetland: An Environmental and Cultural History of Tidewater Virginia and North Carolina* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010); John H. Hartig, *Burning Rivers: Revival of Four Urban-Industrial Rivers that Caught on Fire* (Burlington, VT: Aquatic Ecosystem Health and Management Society, 2010); Bruce J. Weaver, "David Defeats Goliath on the Banks of the Delaware: Rhetorical Legitimacy and the Delaware Water Gap National Recreational Area Debate," in *The Environmental Communication Yearbook*, vol. 2, ed. Susan L. Senecah (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005), 133–62; David J. Grettler, "The Nature of Capitalism: Environmental Change and Conflict over Commercial Fishing in Nineteenth-Century Delaware," *Environmental History* 6 (July 2001): 451–73.
 24. David Soll, "City, Region, and In Between: New York City's Water Supply and the Insights of Regional History," *Journal of Urban History* 38, no. 2 (2012): 295.
 25. Gerard T. Koepfel, *Water for Gotham: A History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Matthew Gandy, *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); Diane Galusha, *Liquid Assets: A History of New York City's Water System* (Fleischmanns, NY: Harbor Hill Books, 2002). Cf. Adam Levine, "Sewers, Pollution, and Public Health in Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Legacies* 10 (May 2010): 14–19. On other New York City topics, see Benjamin Miller, *Fat of the Land: Garbage of New York—The Last Two Hundred Years* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2000); Daniel Eli Burnstein, *Next to Godliness: Confronting Dirt and Despair in Progressive Era New York City* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Sze, *Noxious New York*.
 26. Christopher F. Jones, "A Landscape of Energy Abundance: Anthracite Coal Canals and the Roots of American Fossil Fuel Dependence, 1820–1860," *Environmental History* 15 (2010): 449–84.
 27. Gerard Koepfel, *Bond of Union: Building the Erie Canal and the American Empire* (Boston: Da Capo, 2009); Peter L. Bernstein, *Wedding of the Waters: The Erie Canal and the Making of a Great Nation* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 21; Carol Sheriff, *The Artificial River: The Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817–1862* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996).
 28. There is already significant work on some aspects of this topic. In a highly detailed book, Robert W. Jackson argues for the significance of the Holland Tunnel, noting that "the tunnel's very existence created a new need for 'superhighways' in New York and New Jersey to handle the traffic that it generated—highways that were the first of their kind." Robert W. Jackson, *Highway Under the Hudson: A History of the Holland Tunnel* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 1–2;

- cf. Robert Lifset, "The Environmental Is Political: The Story of the Ill-Fated Hudson River Expressway, 1965–1970," *Hudson River Valley Review* 22 (Spring 2006): 28–53; Eleanor Phillips Brackbill, "The Westchester County Parkway that Never Was," *Hudson River Valley Review* 24 (Autumn 2007): 39–58.
29. David Stradling, *Smokestacks and Progressives: Environmentalists, Engineers and Air Quality in America, 1881–1951* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 2; Scott Hamilton Dewey, *Don't Breathe the Air: Air Pollution and U.S. Environmental Politics, 1945–1970* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000); Longhurst, *Citizen Environmentalists*; Sherie R. Mershon, "Clearing the Air: Smoke Control in Pittsburgh, 1930–1960," *Pennsylvania Legacies* 10 (May 2010): 26–31; essays by Lynn Page Snyder, Angela Gugliotta, and Sherie Mershon and Joel Tarr all appear in *Devastation and Renewal*, ed. Tarr.
 30. Bonnie A. Osif, Anthony J. Baratta, and Thomas W. Conkling, *TMI 25 Years Later: The Three Mile Island Nuclear Power Plant Accident and Its Impact* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004); J. Samuel Walker, *Three Mile Island: A Nuclear Crisis in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).
 31. Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 262–63.
 32. Richardson Dilworth, *The Urban Origins of Suburban Autonomy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Thomas K. Rudel, Karen O'Neill, and Paul Gottlieb, "From Middle to Upper Class Sprawl? Land Use Controls and Changing Patterns of Real Estate Development in Northern New Jersey," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101, no. 3 (2011): 609–24. Cf. Joseph Goddard, "Landscape and Ambience on the Urban Fringe: From Agricultural to Imagined Countryside," *Environment and History* 15 (November 2009): 413–39; Roger Panetta, ed., *Westchester: The American Suburb* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).
 33. Angelique Bamberg, *Chatham Village: Pittsburgh's Garden City* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011); Nicholas Dagen Bloom, *Suburban Alchemy: 1960s New Towns and the Transformation of the American Dream* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001).
 34. Dianne Harris, *Second Suburb: Levittown, Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010).
 35. Quote from Brian Black, *Petrolia: The Landscape of America's First Oil Boom* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 4; Kenneth Warren, *Wealth, Waste, and Alienation: Growth and Decline in the Connellsville Coke Industry* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001); Brian Black and Marcy Ladson, "Oil at 150: Energy Past and Future in Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Legacies* 10 (May 2010): 6–13. For more on oil history outside the Mid-Atlantic, see the special issue of the *Journal of American History* 99 (June 2012).
 36. Sean Patrick Adams, *Old Dominion, Industrial Commonwealth: Coal, Politics, and Economy in Antebellum America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 6.
 37. For more discussion of these issues, see the essays by Vagel Keller and by Brian Black and Marcy Ladson in this volume. Ted Williams, "That Sinking Feeling," *Audubon* 107 (March/April 2005): 42–50; Shirley Stewart Burns, *Bringing Down the Mountains: The Impact of Mountaintop Removal on Southern West Virginia Communities* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2007); Joyce Barry, "Mountaineers Are Always Free?: An Examination of Mountaintop Removal Coal

- Mining in West Virginia" (Ph.D. diss., Bowling Green State University, 2004); Bryan T. McNeil, "Searching for Home Where Mountains Move: The Collision of Economy, Environment, and an American Community" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2005); Chad Montrie, *To Save the Land and People: A History of Opposition to Surface Coal Mining in Appalachia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). A more general survey of the history of public policy including extractive industry in Appalachia is Ronald D. Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia since 1945* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008).
38. Matthew L. Wald, "Federal Regulators Approve Two Nuclear Reactors in Georgia," *New York Times*, February 10, 2012, B3. See the April 2012 issue of *Environmental History* for a special forum on the Fukushima disaster and its meaning for historians.
39. See J. R. McNeill and Corinna R. Unger, eds., *Environmental Histories of the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
40. Stradling, *The Nature of New York*; for an example of policy scholarship devoted to this intermediate level of clashing and competing state powers, see Gregory S. Wilson, *Communities Left Behind: The Area Redevelopment Administration, 1945–1965* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009); Novak, "Myth of the 'Weak' American State," 752–72.
41. Frank Uekoetter, "Thinking Big: The Broad Outlines of a Burgeoning Field," in *The Turning Points of Environmental History*, ed. Frank Uekoetter (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 11.
42. Jens Ivo Engels, "Modern Environmentalism," in *Turning Points of Environmental History*, ed. Uekoetter, 131.
43. Adam Rome, "The Genius of Earth Day," *Environmental History* 15 (2010): 205.