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Review of The Environmental Communication Yearbook Volume 2; Susan Senecah, ed.

James L. Simon
Fairfield University, jlsimon@fairfield.edu

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The Environmental Communication Yearbook, Volume 2, edited by Susan L. Senecah. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005, 173 pp., \$59.95 (cloth).

Yearbooks in various academic disciplines can serve a useful purpose in highlighting significant new work that advances theories or methods, provides an innovative look at the major issues in the discipline, or moves the state of the art ahead in some other manner. The longer length of many pieces collected in a yearbook often can allow researchers to spend more time in offering a complete literature review, provide several directions for future research, or in some other way to go beyond the normal journal article or convention paper. Whether it is the venerable *Communication Yearbook*, now in its 30th edition, the *Ocean Yearbook*, or the many other yearbooks published throughout the academic world, expectations are often higher for the cutting edge studies that are collected in such annual editions.

The work collected in *The Environmental Yearbook, Volume 2*, meets this higher standard. The second edition is shorter than the first (184 pages, vs. 312 pages in the first volume) and less expensive (\$59.95 list price for the hardcover edition, vs. \$79.95 for the first volume). But the unusually strong chapters that start and end the book make the second volume a worthy follow-up effort to the first edition.

In the opening chapter, “Aggressive Mimicry: The Rhetoric of Wise Use and the Environmental Movement,” Jennifer A. Peeples offers a primer on how conservative political forces—including large corporations like Dupont and large U.S. national organizations like the National Rifle Association – can join together, present itself as a grassroots environmental organization, and appropriate the identity, structure and language of the mainstream environmental movement. She writes: “In order to fulfill its transformation into a “grassroots” advocacy group, Wise Use needed an ‘establishment’ to oppose. It chose the environmentalists. . . . By mimicking the structure of environmental organizations (or at least making declarations as such), Wise Use organizations positioned themselves to make the rhetorical claim that they spoke for ‘the people’.” (p. 7). For Wise Use, the goal was to protect landowner’s rights and to push for less government protection of land, particularly in the West. The author avoids making value judgments in assessing the Wise Use approach. But by muddying the public’s understanding of the science behind the issues and by attacking traditional environmental groups as being elitist, the Wise Use approach can be seen as a model for more recent efforts by Intelligent Design proponents to push their view of evolution and by global warming critics to challenge any scientific consensus on the warming issue.

The final chapter, “David Defeats Goliath on the Banks of the Delaware: Rhetorical Legitimacy and the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area Debate,” details how a small environmental group can successfully oppose a massive development project backed by the political establishment. Author Bruce J. Weaver recounts the success of the Delaware Valley Conservation Association in slowing down and ultimately defeating plans to construct a massive damming project for the Delaware River in the 1960s and 1970s. The project was sold with the promise that it would create a

reservoir that would attract 10 million (!) visitors to the environmentally sensitive area. The 29-page article takes advantage of the longer length offered by the yearbook format to offer a primer in the importance of legitimacy in political debates, the changing views toward the environment in the 1960s and 1970s, and the usefulness of confrontational strategies. The lessons from this case study, both for grassroots groups and for government agencies seeking to communicate more effectively, remain timeless.

One complaint is that the Yearbook introduction, which could be used to look across the studies and provide some insight as to why the pieces were picked, is all of four paragraphs long and is perfunctory at best. But the seven studies collected here cover many of the most interesting issues -- prescribed burning, framing nuclear power debates, impact of Sports Utility Vehicles --facing the environmental communication field. They offer a best practices approach for a wide range of methodologies, ranging from the usual case studies to rhetorical analysis, marketing communication, and narrative analysis.

--James Simon

Simon is a former environmental reporter with The Associated Press and a former assistant secretary of the environment in Massachusetts. He currently teaches environmental reporting as the head of the journalism program at Fairfield University in Connecticut.