
Preface and Acknowledgments

The famed naturalist Aldo Leopold was appointed as the first conservation advisor to the United Nations soon after the end of World War II. Yet little is known about Leopold's mandate for this short-lived position that ended with his death in 1948. During my days as a student at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, I often passed by an aging photograph of this illustrious alumnus and frequently wondered how to find a confluence between Leopold's conservation ethic and conflict resolution. I assumed, perhaps naïvely, that the appointment of a conservationist as an advisor to the United Nations would only be to serve the goals of conflict resolution.

As I proceeded through academe, I became increasingly aware that such a confluence is indeed possible, despite the onslaught of literature that diminishes the salience of environmental factors in the higher politics of war and peace. In particular, the possibility of using areas of environmental significance as a common territorial asset is beginning to show promise in various parts of the world and deserves further attention. Ideas about possible topics and authors for this book subsequently evolved through a series of seminars that I led on environmental conflict resolution for a group of midcareer conservation professionals at Brown University. I am indebted to Richard Wetzler and Steven Hamburg for giving me the opportunity to lead this seminar for three consecutive years under a grant from the Luce Foundation.

Subsequently my interactions with the staff of the Environmental Change and Security Project (ECSP) at the Woodrow Wilson Center, particularly their director Geoffrey Dabelko, provided further content and insights for this project. The Wilson Center sponsored a conference in September 2005 where several of the contributing authors to this book were given an opportunity meet and exchange ideas. At the same time ECSP partnered with the United Nations Environment Programme to

launch an expert advisory group on environment conflict and cooperation of which I was a member. Interaction through such forums enriched the volume and provided greater coherence to the arguments presented here.

Preparing an interdisciplinary treatise of this size and scope requires multiple minds and processing time. I was fortunate to have such access to talented individuals, thanks in large part to the highly supportive environment at the University of Vermont. My research assistant and doctoral student Ganlin Huang patiently copyedited and formatted various permutations of the manuscript and deserves foremost gratitude for “getting the job done.” Colleagues around campus, particularly Stephanie Kaza and Ian Worley, supported this effort despite the rather idealistic tone of the title.

I have also benefited from discussions and communications with numerous prominent conservationists and environmental scholars including Aamir Ali, Nigel Allan, Ken Conca, Jason Coburn, Stephen Kellert, Aban Marker-Kabraji, Julia Marton-Lefvre, Teresita Schaffer, Sheila Jasanoff, George Schaller, Jack Shroder, Larry Suskind, and Shirin Tahir-Kheli. The four anonymous reviewers for this manuscript were diligent and rigorous in their evaluation of the manuscript, and I sincerely hope to have met their expectations with the final product. All the contributing authors were prompt in responding to reviews, despite being scattered all over the planet. My acquisition editor at The MIT Press, Clay Morgan, showed remarkable patience with this diffuse project for which the authors and I are especially grateful. We all worked well as a team and met our targets. Additionally my team at home, starting with my mother Parveen, my wife Maria, and our two boys Shahmir and Shahroze, cheered me along as I sat around the house with my laptop clicking away at the edits.

Finally, this book has a futuristic tone, and perhaps the most consequential acknowledgment should be to any policy makers who are willing to realize the vision of peace parks in resolving conflicts in these troubled times.