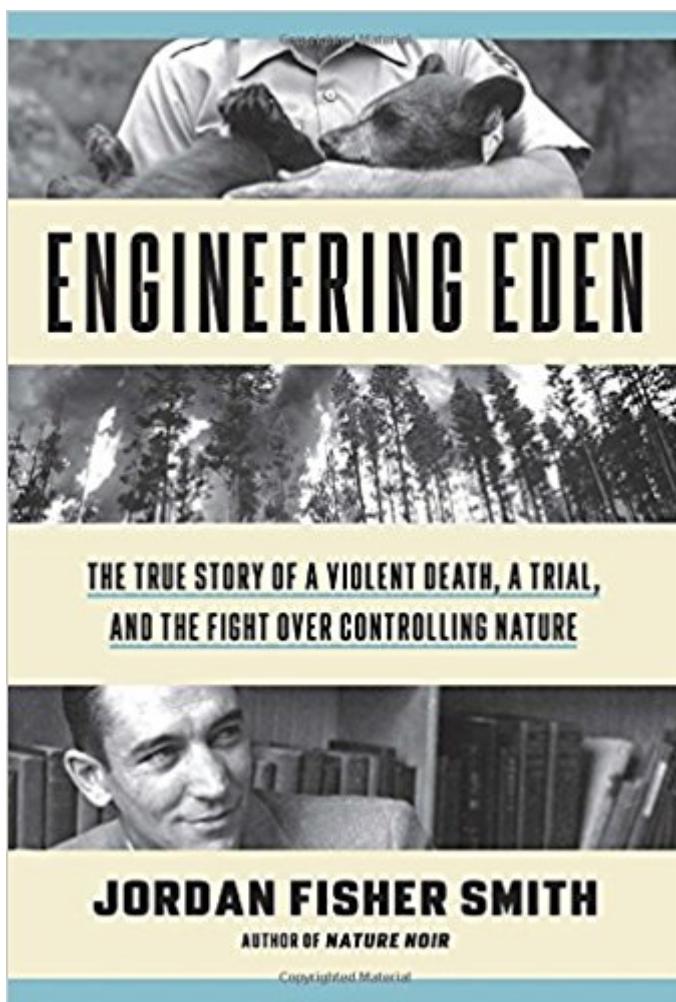


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Engineering Eden: The True Story Of A Violent Death, A Trial, And The Fight Over Controlling Nature



Synopsis

The fascinating story of a trial that opened a window onto the century-long battle to control nature in the national parks. When twenty-five-year-old Harry Walker was killed by a bear in Yellowstone Park in 1972, the civil trial prompted by his death became a proxy for bigger questions about American wilderness management that had been boiling for a century. At immediate issue was whether the Park Service should have done more to keep bears away from humans, but what was revealed as the trial unfolded was just how fruitless our efforts to regulate nature in the parks had always been. The proceedings drew to the witness stand some of the most important figures in twentieth century wilderness management, including the eminent zoologist A. Starker Leopold, who had produced a landmark conservationist document in the 1950s, and all-American twin researchers John and Frank Craighead, who ran groundbreaking bear studies at Yellowstone. Their testimony would help decide whether the government owed the Walker family restitution for Harry's death, but it would also illuminate decades of patchwork efforts to preserve an idea of nature that had never existed in the first place. In this remarkable excavation of American environmental history, nature writer and former park ranger Jordan Fisher Smith uses Harry Walker's story to tell the larger narrative of the futile, sometimes fatal, attempts to remake wilderness in the name of preserving it. Tracing a course from the founding of the national parks through the tangled twentieth-century growth of the conservationist movement, Smith gives the lie to the portrayal of national parks as Edenic wonderlands unspoiled until the arrival of Europeans, and shows how virtually every attempt to manage nature in the parks has only created cascading effects that require even more management. Moving across time and between Yellowstone, Yosemite, and Glacier national parks, *Engineering Eden* shows how efforts at wilderness management have always been undone by one fundamental problem--that the idea of what is "wild" dissolves as soon as we begin to examine it, leaving us with little framework to say what wilderness should look like and which human interventions are acceptable in trying to preserve it. In the tradition of John McPhee's *The Control of Nature* and Alan Burdick's *Out of Eden*, Jordan Fisher Smith has produced a powerful work of popular science and environmental history, grappling with critical issues that we have even now yet to resolve.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“... An intensely reported, rousingly readable and ambitiously envisioned book...This is a book that, while it brims over with descriptions of beautiful places and provides a primer of environmental thought over the past century, weaves together a dramatic court case in Los Angeles, a grizzly-bear attack, and a surprisingly fascinating debate over what constitutes the word “natural” when it comes to national parks, as well as enough characters, complete with back stories, to fill a Leon Uris novel...a thrilling read. Like the best visions for parks, it combines the human and the animal, the managed and the natural, the controlled and the wild.”
“Timely and thoughtful...A vivid account of conflicts within the National Park Service over managing bears and other wild animals...conflicts that contributed to tragic results...Smith’s book will draw you in with his passion, thoughtfulness and first-rate story telling.”
“Engineering Eden” is a dramatic, eye-opening chronicle of the struggle to preserve wilderness while making it accessible to the public...A galvanizing stroyteller fluent in the conflict between environmental science and politics, Smith brings every player into sharp and indelible focus as he illuminates the urgent issues national parks grapple with as they struggle to wisely manage predators, invasive species, wildfires, and people.”
“Booklist, starred review”
“A searching study of a tragedy and the legal contest that followed it, one that shaped the course of national park policy in the modern age. Is a natural environment modified by humans still natural? It’s not just a question for philosophers...Smith, who understands that nature is ‘a web of complex relations,’ tells this complicated story clearly and well. Excellent reading for students of park policy, wildlife management, and other resource issues.”
“Kirkus Reviews”
“This meticulously investigated history of Yellowstone and its wildlife management problems should appeal to fans of Jack Olsen’s classic *Night of the Grizzlies*, as well as to readers interested in the broader issue of

driven out of Yellowstone—because they refused not to speak out against the Park Service. •National Parks Traveler Review—“Smith has pulled off an amazing feat: he’s made wildlife management urgent and engrossing, writing about it with clarity, depth and a storyteller’s pacing—an outstanding introduction to ecological decision-making.” •A Shelf Awareness

JORDAN FISHER SMITH worked for 21 years as a park ranger in California, Wyoming, Idaho, and Alaska. He has since written for numerous publications including Men’s Journal and the Los Angeles Times Magazine, and he is the author of Nature Noir and narrator of the documentary Under Our Skin.

I found this book by Jordan Fisher Smith to be an intriguing historical accounting of the various interactions and interventions of humans in nature, specifically the National Parks and the consequences, both intended and unintended that are left behind. This true tale of park and wildlife management and the tragic incidents that occur as a result of the winding road of decision making demonstrates the difficulty that developed when attempting to adhere to the polar philosophies of those making the decisions. The question--to intervene or not to intervene? The author weaves in specific events such as the death of Harry Walker by a grizzly in Yellowstone in 1972 that perpetuate the question of good decisions and bad decisions made by both the stewards of the National Parks and the individuals who utilize them. The book explores the difficulty of creating a peaceful coexistence of humans and wild animals in the ecosystems in which they now live and roam.. Historical accountings of places and events allow for a review of what has been done and often it is in evaluating this history where learning occurs. The author has done extensive research and outlines the differing philosophies and actions that have been applied to the management of the National Parks. He speaks of real people and is able to characterize them in such a way that the reader can easily feel connected to them in one way or another. This makes you feel that you are in the middle of the drama created in the tale and puts you in the position to ask yourself, "What would I do?" Aside from the miscreant behavior of some, I could easily agree with opposing philosophies that are presented and I could have and probably did camp in areas not designated for camping at an earlier time in my life. After reading this book, I have a renewed appreciation for following the rules and using logical thinking in making a decision. Good decisions can have bad outcomes but more often, bad decisions will have bad outcomes. The best you can do is try to make the best decision with all of the information which is given to you. I appreciate all of the information given in

this book and believe it is a great book for all to read, not just those interested in Wildlife Biology or other specific fields as some reviewers have mentioned.. We all live in nature and are exposed to animals of some sort living in our environment and most of us have traveled to national parks at some time in our life. Education begins with awareness and this book opens your eyes to becoming more cautious about actions that could have serious impact on yourself, others, animals or the environment. It also leaves you with hope that we can get it right with collective input that can help to move closer to the Edenic balance present before the destruction caused by human intervention!

I was working at Old Faithful when this happened and know many of the details. Grizzlies were in our NPS housing area every night. Special precautions were in place when you left a residence after dark. One night there was a 900-pound grizzly on the front porch of the transit hut as we peered out the window thinking how easily this beast could tear down the flimsy door. Hiking back from Shoshone Lake we encountered a grizzly on the trail in the meadow as we came out of the wooded area. We retreated to climb a tree at the same time the grizzly decided to go the other way. The dump in West Yellowstone was like a drive-in to see the grizzlies with many tourists there nightly. The attached photo shows a grizzly at the West Yellowstone dump site. Jordan Fisher Smith has completed detailed research and revealed many facts and circumstances that were not known at the time of the events. He brings out many behind the scene events and personalities. The facts surrounding the death of Harry Walker are very accurate as described. He masterfully shows how the management of natural resources by the National Park Service has evolved over the years and what brought about the changes. At the 100 year anniversary of the NPS, this book provides valuable insight and perspectives about the creation of the National Park System and the challenges that are ahead in the coming decades. Enjoyable read providing many details of how this affected the persons involved and the resulting changes in park management.

Jordan Fisher Smith has written a magnificent book. Obviously, the hook here is the encounter between a grizzly and a human, with an unfortunate but predictable outcome. Mr. Smith, however, takes the reader behind the curtain into the inner workings of the National Park Service to discover the back-stories that created the conditions for this tragedy and many others. These include the wrangling over grizzly bear management policies between scientists and the Park Service, and between respected scientists themselves. The coverage of the history of the Park Movement, the evolution of scientific thought, and the application of science to real-life management decisions all add value to this book. Most intriguing and thought-provoking is the analysis of the biggest

argument in park resource management — whether to let nature take its course, or whether park professionals should intervene to help create and sustain desired conditions in parks. Mr. Smith spent innumerable hours with victims, their families, scientists, and park managers to create this meticulously-researched and splendid work.

"Engineering Eden" starts from a lawsuit surrounding a man who was killed in a 1972 Yellowstone bear mauling, Harry Walker. I had already read, elsewhere, about the Walker trial, in which it appeared to be a simple story about a foolish hippie. But Smith shows that the trial was actually about bigger issues: about wildlife management in the national parks. How do we manage bears, and their habitat, in places that we want to think of as "wild" and "Eden" -- but which we also must manage for literally millions of tourists? Smith takes us through the history of scientific disagreements about how to solve these impossible problems. He's remarkably evenhanded: Every scientist, lawyer, victim, and family member, on every side of every issue, is painted roundly enough to be sympathetic. To me that evenhandedness sometimes got in the way of narrative -- I would ask, "now, wait, is this a 'good guy' or a 'bad guy'?" -- but I have to give Smith credit, because that fair play is what creates such a great learning opportunity. In a summer of record-breaking tourism and numerous tourist-wildlife incidents, this history is particularly relevant.

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