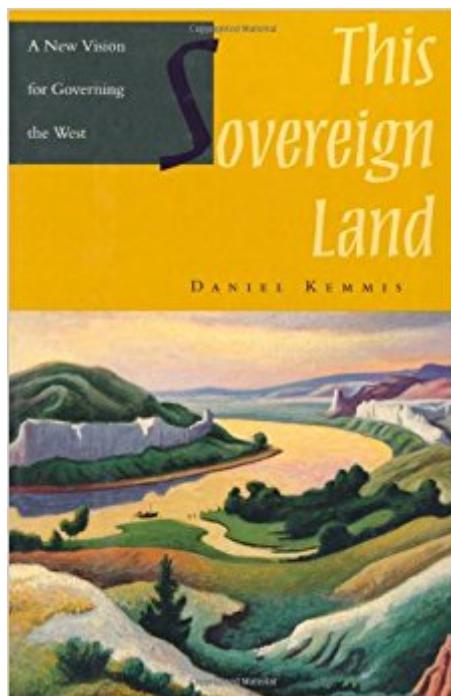


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This Sovereign Land: A New Vision For Governing The West



Synopsis

This work proposes that the management of public lands by the federal government of the USA is no longer working in the eastern part of the country. The author believes that the West should manage its own public lands, under various governmental structures. He argues that the West, by rights, should have control over the land in its region. It points to the efforts all over the West as evidence of the West's maturity and also as a model for how the West would govern its lands.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Daniel Kemmis is a creative, innovative, 'outside-of-the-box' thinker who makes a persuasive argument for a radical change that just might have you writing your Congressman when you finish the last chapter." --Natural Resources Journal

Daniel Kemmis is director of the Center for the Rocky Mountain West at The University of Montana in Missoula, Montana. He formerly served as minority leader and speaker of the Montana House of Representatives, and as mayor of Missoula. His books include *Community and the Politics of Place* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1990) and *The Good City and the Good Life* (Houghton Mifflin, 1995).

A clue as to where and how the West would be roped, harnessed and destroyed. All in double speak. His vision not ours and not America's.

Daniel Kemmis, the author of this thoughtful book, is the director of the Center for the Rocky Mountain West at the University of Montana and formerly served as the mayor of Missoula Montana. He describes himself early in the book as a democrat with a capital "D". However he makes proposals for local control of management decisions on Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Lands in the Western States that are ordinarily associated with Republican or conservative positions. The focus of the book is the "interior west" consisting of the states of Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming. These states are characterized by rugged terrain, a lack of water, sparse population, an abundance of timber and extractive resources and a high percentage of Federally owned land. Kemmis argues that it is no longer good policy for these lands to be managed under the current confusing Federal statutory regime. He argues for collaboration among westerners and involved users to determine the best ways for the West to manage its lands. Much the best part of this book, for me, was the historical perspective Kemmis brings to his study. He writes perceptively and well about Thomas Jefferson and Theodore Roosevelt's important but conflicting visions about the American West. Jefferson, an expansionist in spite of himself, was fascinated with nature but viewed the West as a buffer for National security and as a component of his vision of an America consisting of small yeomen. Roosevelt too was an expansionist but saw the need of tight Federal control of the West and its resources to protect them for future generations. Current policy is an uneasy mix of Jeffersonian and Rooseveltian ideas. There is also a good, if brief, discussion of the Lincoln-Douglas debates and how the different visions of these two men played out over time on issues of local versus national control. I found it creative. Kemmis argues that the West has attained a great deal of sophistication (maturation) since Theodore Roosevelt's days and should be allowed a greater voice in the management of its (the United States') resources. He maintains that the Federal government is increasingly distant from the concerns of the West, and that the current Federal management regime is inconsistent with basic Jeffersonian democracy -- the people managing the resources of concern to them and thus taking a greater control of their own lives. He argues that Federal statutes and administrative officials are almost uniformly well-intentioned but that the West is too caught in the politics of Washington D.C., resulting in dissatisfaction by those in the region regardless of their other political commitments. In advocating for "collaborationism", Kemmis is aware of the policy (and law) requiring public participation in land use decisions. He argues that people are reluctant to collaborate when they know that decisionmakers in Washington D.C. will have the ultimate say over the management of their lands. This is a constructive book with many interesting things to say. As I noted, its strength is

that it is historically well-informed. The weakness of the book is that it is short, overly anecdotal, and not entirely convincing in its claim that the Federal government is an intruder in the management of these lands. They are Federally owned, after all, to be used for the benefit of the American people. Less philosophically, I don't think Kemmis is convincing in showing the local control would result in more satisfactory and communally acceptable decision making. It would simply put the issues back on a local level where they are now in large part anyway. Even though the conclusions are debatable, Kemmis's book is a valuable study of public lands management in the American West and how lands management ties in with our Nation's democratic (small "d") vision.

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