

# Book Review ~ *Intelligent Courage: Natural Resource Careers that Make a Difference* by Michael E. Fraidenburg

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In the summer of 1999, I stuffed most of what I owned into the back of a compact pickup and drove from central Pennsylvania to the northern tip of Puget Sound, where I had recently accepted a position as an industry consultant. It was my first job as a natural resource professional and I was excited. That enthusiasm waned over the next several years, however, as I wrestled with the mounting sense that I was playing for the wrong team. I eventually resigned and moved on to a Ph.D. in aquatic ecology. Looking back, I realize that the decision to leave was facilitated by my financial independence; with relatively little debt and no family to care for, I was free to go. But I've often wondered how I would have reacted under different circumstances. Would children and a mortgage payment have kept me in place? If so, would I have confronted my supervisor over decisions that I did not feel were scientifically justified, or would I have conceded to company interests?

Michael Fraidenburg tackles a number of related questions in *Intelligent Courage: Natural Resource Careers that Make a Difference*. Fraidenburg's target audience is the early- to mid-career natural resource manager or scientist who, by definition, is vulnerable to coercion from more senior influences. His objective is to confer ground-level guidance to readers who wish to guard their professional integrity, but fear that doing so may elicit reprisal. His mechanism is a compilation of narratives from eight leading voices in the field of natural resource management and policy. For example, Mike Dombeck relates some of the philosophical and programmatic hurdles that he encountered as Chief of the U.S. Forest Service, and how he ultimately overcame them – without being fired. Gloria Flora recounts her showdown with the oil and gas industry over exploration and drilling in the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains. And Tom Peterson discusses the proactive strategies that he uses to initiate dialogue on the importance of climate change, and to catalyze mitigative action.

Each of the eight narratives is refreshingly candid. At approximately 20 pages apiece, they are also decidedly readable. The real value of the book, however, stems from the diversity of opinions and experiences that the eight contributing authors bring to the discussion. Fraidenburg should be applauded for assembling such an inclusive cross section of the natural resource management community. Agency and academic voices are represented in equal measure. So, too, are scientific and political perspectives. There is even a bit of human psychology and decision theory (but not enough to weigh the book down). *Intelligent Courage* is laced with sagacious advice, and natural resource professionals, aspiring and practicing alike, would do well to heed its lessons.

That said, I found the punctuated tempo of the book somewhat distracting. Considerable wisdom is at hand, but it is presented in sound bites that left me wondering what an appropriate take-home message might be. Fraidenburg addresses this issue in the final chapter, where he identifies some common principles and guidelines. But this synthesis is, in my opinion, too much: in a nutshell, it amounts to “know yourself, know your surroundings, and know the system.” Granted. I suspect, however, that a practicing manager would, in the midst of a professional conflict, be hoping for more specific or tangible guidance.

Having read *Intelligent Courage*, can I honestly say that I'll be better prepared the next time I find myself going against the grain? Probably. But even if I'm not, I think I now know where to look for further counsel. Each of the contributing authors in this book has succeeded because they have, among other things, exceptional interpersonal skills. And so I have little doubt that any of them would be willing to discuss my own problem. Together, I'm certain we could find a solution that was both intelligent and courageous.