

Half Wild: People, Dogs, and Environmental Policy

Dave Dempsey

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Dave Dempsey spent more than three decades working in a range of environmental-policy roles in Michigan, and those experiences inform his new essay collection *Half Wild*. The stories in the book all discuss the intersection of human life with wildlife, showing how humans and animals influence one another.

Many of the essays deal with the political challenges of environmental policy. In “Wilderness,” Dempsey meets with a notoriously cantankerous constituent who opposed government efforts to protect wild areas and who showed his displeasure in a variety of ways. “The Bird of Peace” discusses a political fight in Michigan between hunters who wanted to add mourning doves to their hit lists and the outraged majority of citizens vocally opposed to that plan. “The Moose Drop” describes the Sisyphean ordeal of reintroducing wildlife species that were hunted to local extinction, like moose and pheasants, only to have locals demand to hunt them again once their numbers improve. These essays underscore the tension between the mission to preserve wilderness and wildlife, and the demands of politically connected opponents of that mission.

Pollution is another consistent topic. “Toxic Shock” describes the disconnect between studies showing dangerous levels of chemicals in the water and the refusal of fisherman and others to accept those findings. “Landfill in the Sky” discusses a community damaged by a local incinerator and the chemicals it released, as well as how the Michigan government came to allow that situation. Another series of short stories scattered throughout the book introduce Dempsey’s dogs through the years, providing a pleasant break from some of the otherwise bleak subject matter.

The essays of *Half Wild* glimpse behind the scenes of battles between conservation and environmental destruction, affirming that those battles are still worth fighting.

JEFF FLEISCHER (September / October 2022)

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