Foreword Review ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

The Chesapeake in Focus: Transforming the Natural World

Tom Pelton
Johns Hopkins University Press (Apr 15, 2018)
Softcover $24.95 (264pp)
978-1-4214-2475-0

Tom Pelton's *The Chesapeake in Focus* introduces the complicated story of the region's environmental restoration. The nation's largest estuary straddles a wide swath of the eastern coastline, and is impacted by agricultural and industrial pollution, intense development pressure, and public sewage leaks. All of these factors dampen the fragile, costly progress of voluntary and governmental regulation, and climate change threatens to upend all gains with extreme weather patterns and warming water temperatures.

Short, punchy chapters zero in on specific geographical areas, wildlife, policies, and local people. It's a balanced, organized approach that breaks down the many nuances of environmental policy-making and monitoring. Pelton isn't shy about pointing out problems and polluters, profiling several people with whom he does not agree, including a farmer and fisherman, to assess their views about the bay.

Though Pelton strongly opposes President Trump's EPA dismantling and the "desperate environmentalism" of many groups' soft-pedal strategies, he also gives credit to politicians of both parties for enacting the Clean Air and Water Acts, banning DDT, and other measures that have improved environmental quality.

Like other river systems, the Chesapeake is affected by human activity emanating far up its watershed. Silt, agricultural pesticides and antibiotics, and leaking municipal sewage pipes from as far north as New York erode water quality and disrupt the delicate life cycles of the bay's fish, crabs, and birds. Pelton passionately argues for stronger, long-term federal oversight to reverse these problems, and outlines a series of policy changes in his conclusion.

While one wonders why Pelton would want to splash around in his kayak in the fecal-chemical cocktail that he describes, the book's photographs show the Chesapeake's serene beauty, and underscore why the fight to regain this precious region's environmental health is so important.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (March/April 2018)

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