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## Book Review: Forest of Time: A Century of Science at Wind River Experimental Forest, by Margaret Herring and Sarah Greene

Emily K. Brock

University of South Carolina - Columbia, brock@sc.edu

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over dams and fish runs, but the history is fairly thin and he glosses over the most difficult questions, such as the role of the Endangered Species Act requirements or near defiance of court rulings by successive federal administrations. Barenti finds more information and insight in his recorded discussions with people he encounters on his journey. In short, Barenti's journalistic approach — he is a professional journalist — provides most of the substance he includes on the salmon crisis in the Pacific Northwest. He is unconvinced by anyone he meets, leaving readers wondering if any position on the salmon issue is salient. "A former girlfriend who had spent her career working for various public advocacy groups," Barenti writes, "once called me a consensus seeker. It wasn't a compliment. . . . I lack the convictions of a true believer. I am, instead skeptical about almost everything. Maybe working as a reporter has made me this way; maybe my skepticism made me a reporter" (p. 143). His skepticism may be well placed, but it renders his account fairly shallow. For deeper treatment of the issue by another journalist, readers should consult the dated, but still insightful, *Common Fate: Endangered Salmon and the People of the Northwest* (1995) by Joseph Cone.

Barenti's book excels in adventure travel and environmental description, its primary contributions to literature on the Pacific Northwest. He beautifully delivers an intimate portrait, from the water's edge, of Idaho's wilderness, the dammed Lower Snake River, and the Columbia River main stem that transports readers to real places and genuine engagement with the environment. He describes river conditions and the origins of changes that contribute to the decline of anadromous fish, such as the South Fork of the Salmon River, where fishers regularly caught thousands of migrating Chinook until the 1960s, when "the forest service allowed timber cutting in the watershed [where] . . . silt from the cleared mountainsides smothered clean gravels where salmon had spawned and filled pools where the

young salmon lived before migrating to the ocean" (p. 67). On the lower Columbia, where industrialism and urban growth might seem to eliminate natural conditions, Barenti finds a riverscape that contradicts the image of an altered river. "The river broke into a maze of channels braided through with islands big and small as it broadened itself into an estuary. . . . the Columbia in its last miles looks more like a patch of Pacific Ocean squeezed inland than a part of some great river system flowing down from high mountains in the continent's far interior" (p. 216).

Mike Barenti takes the measure of the Salmon, Snake, and Columbia rivers by kayak and gives readers an up-close portrait of today's river conditions. Mike Farmer carries us along his western road trip, providing snapshot images of today's changing American West. Both end abruptly, as do most travel narratives, with clear affirmations of the journeys' worth and benefits to the travelers. Like other travelogues about the West, these two take us to the territories, while they also offer smart portraits of a dynamically changing region.

WILLIAM L. LANG  
*Portland State University*

## FOREST OF TIME: A CENTURY OF SCIENCE AT WIND RIVER EXPERIMENTAL FOREST

by Margaret Herring and Sarah Greene  
foreword by William G. Robbins

Oregon State University Press, Corvallis, 2007.  
Photographs, maps, notes, index. 200 pages.  
\$22.95 paper.

Forests, perhaps more than any other type of ecosystem, invite long-term biological study. Because the ecosystems are dominated by species that are both long-lived and economically important, interest in better understanding both forest biology and forestry principles is

understandable. European and Asian forests have long been sites of scientific investigation, and in recent centuries, American forests have become so as well. Situated along a tributary of the Columbia River in Skamania County, Washington, the Wind River Experimental Forest has been a site for scientific activity for a century. Research at the site began very early in the twentieth century, with the first small-scale forays into understanding the physiology and the ecology of the Douglas Fir forest. As Douglas Fir lumber increased in importance to the region's economy, so too increased the intensity of research at the Wind River site. The United States Forest Service gradually formalized the Wind River forest's role, eventually designating it an Experimental Forest within the boundaries of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest and putting it under the control of the Portland-based Pacific Northwest Research Station.

*Forest of Time* focuses on the scientific activities at the Wind River site, from its earliest days up through its present-day role in federal forest research. Most of the scientific studies that took place at Wind River were detailed in USDA Research Papers and Technical Notes, leaving an extensive archive of published material for Margaret Herring and Sarah Greene to mine. The authors also incorporate information from oral history interviews with Wind River scientists, although they unfortunately make minimal use of unpublished archival materials. Beyond the written word, however, the forest itself has left tangible evidence of past scientific activity. The authors emphasize the long-term stability of forests and the incredible durability of past work there. Scientists' plantings and test plots from many decades earlier are still visible at Wind River today. The book is at its best when focused on the internal history of the forest itself and those who worked there. The authors frame their subject within the vibrant history of the twentieth-century Pacific Northwest, tapping into local understanding and interest in the region's forests.

The authors describe the history of the Wind River Experimental Forest in relative isolation, usually focusing squarely on academic and Forest Service scientists and their work. When scientific and political developments on the national and global scale are mentioned, they serve for the most part as a backdrop to the scientific struggles and triumphs at Wind River. Field science always comes with a fascinating paradox, as research so utterly rooted in a particular landscape is used to infer truths about the larger world. Historians of science sometimes fail to remember that science never occurs in a vacuum, that it always happens in particular landscapes and, to use Robert Kohler's term, labscales. Science, even field science, is never truly local, nor truly universal. Recent historical research in twentieth-century American field sciences plays with this paradox, exploring this boundary between the locally grounded and the widely understood. As the authors point out, the foresters and other researchers at Wind River circulated among, and corresponded with, others around the nation and the world. Placing Wind River more explicitly in the historical context of long term field research could have underscored this forest's importance not just to the region, but also to forestry as a discipline.

The authors portray the Wind River Experimental Forest as a crossroads of forest knowledge, a vantage point from which the larger histories of forestry, environmentalism, and the lumber industry can be fleetingly glimpsed. Rooted in a particular place, surrounded by the seemingly eternal forest, Herring and Greene depict the Pacific Northwest's past and present as reflected in the workings of a single forest.

EMILY K. BROCK  
*University of South Carolina*

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