



◆ Good Reads

Good Reads: Ecological Vignettes

- Karen Baker, Palmer LTER (PAL)

Eugene Odum, 1998. Ecological Vignettes: Ecological Approaches to Dealing with Human Predicaments, Harwood Academic Publishers, 269p.

Eugene Odum's 'Ecological Vignettes' brings to mind Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring' in that it presents the particular along with some general ramifications. The book is divided into two parts with vignettes followed by more detailed essays that reference the scientific literature. The vignettes synthesize insights from a broad ecological career that has focused over the years on local as well as global systems with some sensitivity to political, economic, and social ramifications. The scaling of knowledge grounded by experience with watershed studies provides a much needed articulation about issues at the ecosphere level. Odum builds from a starting point, his determining factor, that the human population has reached the maximum carrying capacity of the earth as a whole. With a nontraditional, multi-tier presentation format, Odum invites and then supports participation from a broad audience by providing tools in the form of access to information in an approachable format. From the dark side of technology to the tyranny of small decisions, the book provides an often elusive bigger picture relevant to individual reflection as well as national action.

Good Read: A History of the Ecosystem Concept in Ecology

- Karen Baker, Palmer LTER (PAL)

Frank Golley, 1993. A History of the Ecosystem Concept in Ecology, Yale University Press, 254p.

In order to gain insight into a concept, context is provided by some often-nonlinear historical events. As LTER community members, we benefit from the the sweep and the depth of Frank Golley's presentation on ecosystem science. As information managers, we benefit from his recognition of the need for information management in combining, extending and passing on the data that science gathers. One historical note worth mentioning because it highlights an important distinction sometimes lost in the tacit understanding of our current research environment, is that LTER is not an acronym for Long-Term Ecosystem Research (p118) but rather for Long-Term Ecological Research. Is this an important distinction? Golley provides organizational examples, contrasting the business model for big science programs with a more academic approach. LTER, as a network, is a community organization model that explicitly adopts an integrative embrace of ecology, avoiding potential misunderstandings over the multiple levels of meaning and history associated with the term 'ecosystem research'. The LTER understaking is an ongoing re-balance of understandings generated by the multiple views afforded by the spectrum of reductionist to holistic, by the elements juxtapositioned with the whole.