Lisa Brady’s 2005 *Environmental History* article about the role of nature in the Civil War has become a foundational essay for environmental historians interested in the American South. We have waited anxiously for Brady’s book to tease out fully the provocative ideas offered in that essay. The monograph has arrived and proves worth the wait.

One reason environmental historians have been so excited about the prospect of this book is because Brady’s task was so unenviable. I’ll state the obvious: there is *a lot* of work done on the history of the Civil War, and most of it is, historiographically and methodologically speaking, a long way from environmental history. Brady has walked into the densest thicket of American history scholarship and emerged with a new and important perspective not only on the military strategies of the Civil War, but also on southern environmental history generally. Military and environmental scholars alike will learn something; the growing cadre of historians who work in both of these fields will have much to think and argue about for years to come.

This is an important book. It is not, however, an environmental history of the Civil War. Rather it is a focused examination of Union military strategy in the siege of Vicksburg, the Shenandoah Valley campaigns, and Sherman’s March to the Sea, as that strategy pertained to the environment. In each of these areas, Brady describes how Union forces overcame obstacles of nature—flooding rivers, steep hills, bogs, weather, disease—to attack Confederate troops. It is her explanation of the Yankee strategy of destruction, however, that is most important.
Brady explains how Ulysses S. Grant learned from his experience in the long battle for Vicksburg that choking Confederate access to natural resources was as effective a strategy as bombardment. It served two purposes: first to cut off enemy access to food and fuel, second to feed the Union’s own army. “In ordering his troops to live off the land, Grant effectively initiated a *chevauchée*, turning the improvements locals had made to his advantage while simultaneously reducing the Confederacy’s control over the same” (p. 56). Brady’s is a retelling of the Battle of Vicksburg where the rivers, cattle, rain, bacon, disease, weather, corn, and hills are an active slate of forces on par with men and women.

Grant’s victory at Vicksburg catapulted him into the national spotlight and landed him control of the entire U.S. Army and its strategy. He took the lessons of Vicksburg—particularly the strategy to take advantage of nature—and applied them to all future campaigns across the country. In the Shenandoah Valley, Brady argues that Grant saw Virginians’ fertile landscape as a liability rather than a strength. It is here Brady makes her most important point. Union forces turned this productive, even idyllic, southern landscape into a “ravaged ground.” And while some Union men (and a few historians) remarked that the land itself had been literally destroyed, Brady disagrees. Armies had not ruined the land, she argues, but “Union actions in the Shenandoah in 1864 did in fact destroy the Valley’s *landscape*” (p. 92, italics added). In other words, the relationship between the community and their fields, streams, and built environments was irreparably harmed. The land itself simply took on another form. To be sure, this is an important distinction and a great example of how Brady’s environmental lens provides new insights into the human history of the nation’s greatest war.

The book’s narrow focus allows Brady to make a convincing argument, but it is also a shortcoming. Brady admits that the perspectives of common Union soldiers, most Confederates, and all African Americans are absent. These other groups undoubtedly saw nature and landscape in fundamentally different ways than Union officers. As a result, others will write more—in fact, much has been written about the environmental history of the war since Brady’s article first appeared—but this book has established the basic outline for future scholarship.

One final point that needs to be recorded on the pages of this journal regards the book series of which Brady’s volume is part, the University of Georgia Press’s Environmental History and the American South series. Now eleven volumes strong, this collection has done as much to aid and shape the study of southern environmental history as any person or institution. Paul Sutter’s editorship is undoubtedly a large part of the collection’s success, and in turn, the series’ excellent
books—Brady’s included—have laid the foundation of this still-growing field.

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Mainers like to think of their state as unique: the sign greeting visitors says, “As Life Ought to Be.” Others may feel that Maine is so different that reading about it is of little value to those living or studying elsewhere. This reviewer is not an ecologist, but the general similarity of climate, vegetation, and social conditions in nearby Canada and across the so-called Northern Forest to upstate New York suggests that readers within this wider region will find much in this book that is informative. Maine accounts for roughly half the forest area of New England, and within its state lines occur at least small examples of many regional forest types, from the subalpine zones on Katahdin to the oak woods around Mt. Agamenticus in York County.

The authors observe, “Maine is one of the few states where forest issues are front-page news.” They wisely, however, decline to let their book be driven by what people are now reading on the front pages. Instead, they focus on the forest itself. This book is not aimed at the policy junkies, who should read it if they want to understand Maine’s forest resource. Another book on the often strident policy debates of recent decades remains to be written. Barton, White, and Cogbill are ecologists, and they keep their focus on Maine’s forest as an ecosystem.

This book does not pigeonhole neatly; it will serve many purposes over the years for different audiences. Its attention to different aspects of Maine’s forests is one of its strengths. Instructors will use portions of it in botany, ecology, geography, and history and environmental studies courses. Graduate students will value it for its extensive citations to literature. Someone may even decide to use it as a text for a course focused on Maine’s forests. Established scientists or newcomers to the region will value its readable overview. The book presents summaries of data that Cogbill has been gathering from land survey