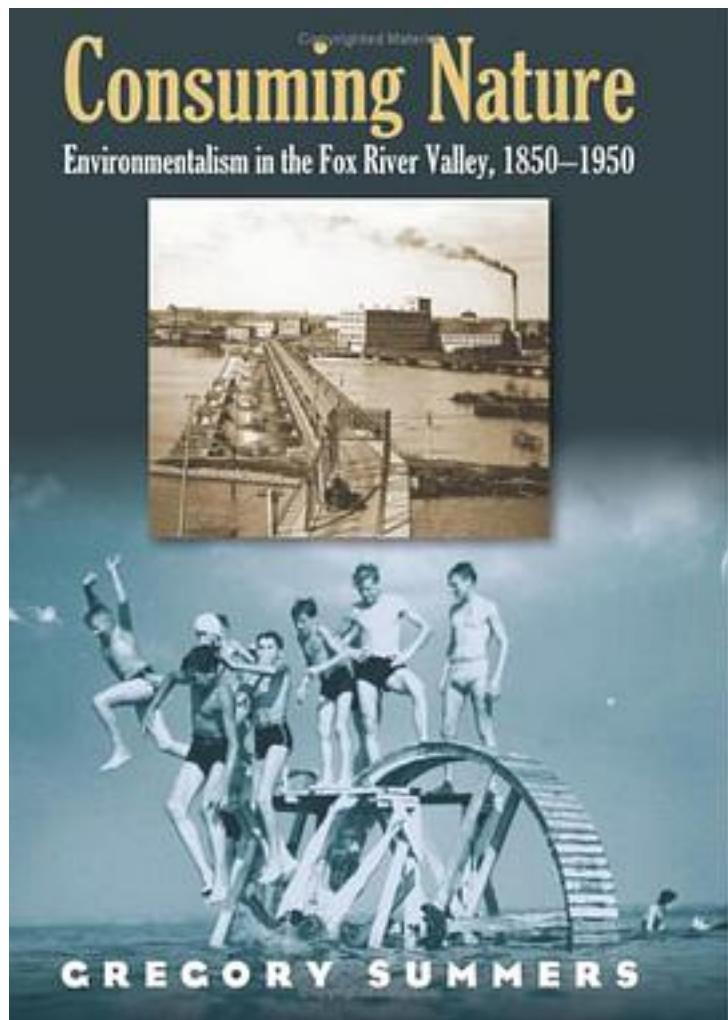


# Consuming Nature



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Environmental debates often pit the protection of nature against economic growth.

But as Gregory Summers reveals, environmentalism has unsuspected roots in consumerism that extend deeper than our present-day dilemmas. In *Consuming Nature*, he tells of an early confrontation that set the stage for *Silent Spring*, pushing the dawn of environmental politics back several decades. Summers takes readers to Wisconsin's Fox River Valley more than fifty years ago to recount how technological and economic progress contributed to residents' growing opposition to the industrial pollution of the river. On the one hand, there was the Wisconsin paper industry--long the largest employer in the area but also largely responsible for polluting the Fox River. On the other hand, there was the burgeoning demand for outdoor recreation among local residents, which put the river's recreational and aesthetic benefits on an equal footing with its industrial potential. As a result, many citizens felt that paper mills no longer deserved carte blanche to dump their waste. This shift from an industrial to consumer society eventually showed up in a small Green Bay courthouse. There attorneys for the Izaak Walton League confronted Adolph Kanneberg, a long-time conservationist now defending the paper industry, with charges that the Fox River had been defiled. But Summers ranges well beyond this courtroom battle. Drawing on prominent national figures, from Frederick Jackson Turner and Theodore Roosevelt to Joseph R. McCarthy, he shows how this local drama was playing on a much larger stage. Wisconsin's showdown over water quality, in fact, was being repeated throughout the country in similar disputes involving urban sprawl and the destruction of wilderness, as Americans struggled to balance their use of nature against the need to protect the environment. Summers tracks the widening separation between production and consumption over a hundred years, a transformation that helps to explain the polarized character of modern environmental politics. He reveals that the redefinition of nature upon which environmentalism relied was the product of the very forces it opposed, a dilemma whose origins lay in the unexpected connection between the efficient use of natural resources and the growing movement to value nature in its own right. In this way, Summers shows that modern environmentalism is among the most important legacies of a consumer society. Ultimately, by framing the human relationship to nature in terms of production and consumption, Summers fosters a better understanding of the philosophy of the modern environmental movement.

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