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**Book Review:** *Betrayal of Science and Reason: How Anti-Environmental Rhetoric Threatens our Future*, Paul R. Ehrlich and Anne H. Ehrlich, Island Press, 1996, 320 pages.

## Ehrlichs Good at Setting the Record Straight

by Mike Hudak, author of  
*Western Turf Wars: The Politics of Public Lands Ranching*

Confused by conflicting claims about the environment? Then the Ehrlichs' latest book is just what you need to see through the "brownlash" rhetoric of the anti-environmental "wise-use" movement.

It was, in fact, the increasing appearance and appeal of such rhetoric that prompted the Ehrlichs to write a book presenting the consensus scientific views on the topics of global warming, acid rain, stratospheric ozone depletion, species extinction and the negative impacts of human population growth.

Written in a concise statement/response format, the Ehrlichs analyze referenced brownlash quotations and explain each author's biases and misstatements or half-truths. For example, several brownlash writers have dismissed the threat of global warming, one even claiming that the only consequence would be the need for more and better air conditioners.

But, as the Ehrlichs point out, such statements ignore effects of increasing temperatures on plants and animals that have adapted to a particular climate. Specifically speaking, "The trees of the Washington, DC, area can't just fly up to Boston or put on a lighter shirt when the heat becomes too much for them."

And what about changes in sea level as polar ice caps decrease in volume? Current estimates project a sea level rise of approximately three feet by the end of the 21st century, exposing many more people (assuming present population distribution) to coastal storm surges, and resulting in substantial land losses in many countries. Six percent of the Netherlands would be under water, as would 17% of Bangladesh.

The Ehrlichs are not reluctant to suggest less than honorable motivations for many brownlash proponents. While acknowledging that among scientists dissent is proper and necessary when supported by evidence, it is not so valid when the scientist simply receives financial support from corporations that would face reduced profits if the public were to demand stricter environmental regulations. Among this group of scientists one finds Patrick Michaels, a University of Virginia climatologist, who has downplayed the effects of global warming while accepting six-figure consulting fees from coal and other energy interests.

The Ehrlichs also examine how brownlash misinformation is transmitted to the public and becomes included in policy dialog. Partly it's due to the failure of environmental scientists to educate the public about the disciplines of ecology, evolutionary biology and climatology. Partly it's due to a news business in which controversy and scandal sell; stories about the gradual deterioration of our environment do not.

And partly it's due to a small subset of journalists whose objectivity has been questioned. Rush Limbaugh is the most notorious of these people, but the Ehrlichs also cite Sam Donaldson of ABC News and John Stossel of ABC's *20/20*, the latter having received thousands of dollars in speaking fees from chemical companies and business groups.

As an antidote to the spread of misinformation, the Ehrlichs urge their fellow scientists to communicate more with the public, and for the concerned citizen to seek out information in environmental publications such as *Sierra*, *World Watch*, *Wilderness*, *The Amicus Journal*, and in reputable scientific journals.

Although there are, it seems, no easy paths to environmental literacy, the Ehrlichs have at least shown us where the paths are and have helped us to avoid a few missteps.