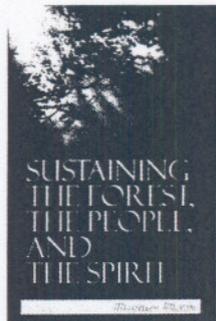


Reviews

Sustaining the Forest, the People, and the Spirit

BY THOMAS DAVIS



(State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 2000. Pp. 244. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 0-7914-4416-3, \$17.95, paperback.)

IF you drive east on Wisconsin State Highway 47 through Langlade County, you see mainly open farmland with patches of forest. When you cross the county line into the Menominee Indian Reservation and suddenly find yourself surrounded by a thick forest of tall pines, you feel like you are entering a different world. Awe may turn into puzzlement a few miles later, however, when you pass the large tribal sawmill—proof of a thriving timber industry seemingly incompatible with the dense reservation forest.

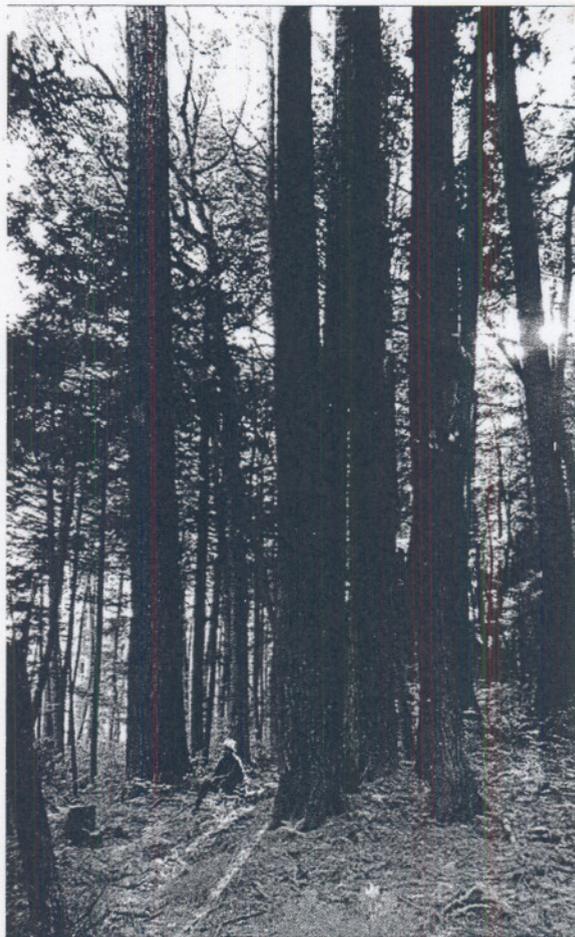
Thomas Davis's new book, *Sustaining the Forest, the People, and the Spirit*, argues that the Menominee Reservation does in fact represent a different world—a world in which natural resources can be harvested in a sustainable manner. The outline of the heavily forested reservation can be seen clearly in satellite photos, in contrast to the land cleared around it during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (You may view one such photo in a U. S. Environmental Protection Agency report at www.epa.gov/glnpo/menominee.) The author, president of the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College near Hayward, Wisconsin, asserts that the Menominee timber industry stands as a “microcosm” of successful sus-

tainable forestry practices, offering lessons far beyond Wisconsin. Indeed, forestry experts from Latin America, Asia, and Russia have visited the reservation to learn about Menominee forestry techniques.

The book's major contribution, however, is showing how the Menominee “model” has involved more than the choice of scientifically correct silviculture techniques. Davis clearly demonstrates how Menominee sustainable development is deeply rooted in the context of tribal culture, spirituality, political institutions, and economics. First, since the reservation was established in 1854, tribal members have treated their forest as a “commons.” Their emphasis on collective property (with strict private access controls) contrasts with the private property notions of nineteenth-century timber barons and the twentieth-century “wise use”

movement. Second, Menominee religious systems do not privilege human beings or specific animal or tree species, but instead emphasize complex and diverse relationships among species. Their view of a proper human relationship to the Earth stands in contrast both to utilitarian corporate views and to environmentalist visions of an empty, non-human wilderness. Third, the tribe has organized its natural resource management not for short-term financial gain, but for long-term sustainability—one reason the Menominee have survived periods of poverty, such as during the federal termination of their tribal status from 1961 to 1973.

Although Davis portrays Menominee



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The results of Menominee forestry techniques, from the Menominee Reservation near Shawano.

forestry as a unique, culturally based model, he maintains that similar frameworks for a sustainable world can emerge outside Native American thought. Citing works by Henry David Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, Talbot Page, and others, he effectively builds a bridge between indigenous cultural systems and Western environmental thinking. Davis's book should be read especially by those who identify Wisconsin tribes only with their new casinos and by those who believe that Native ecological beliefs are merely an invented myth.

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