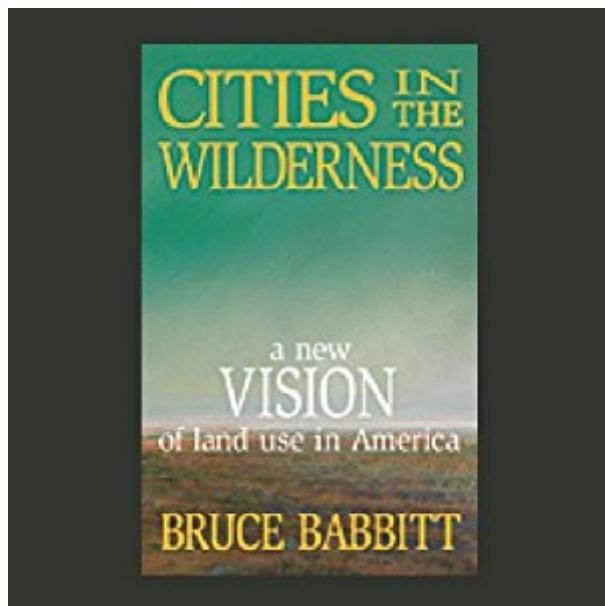


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# Cities In The Wilderness: A New Vision Of Land Use In America



## **Synopsis**

In this brilliant, gracefully written, and important new book, former Secretary of the Interior and Governor of Arizona Bruce Babbitt brings fresh thought--and fresh air--to questions of how we can build a future we want to live in. We've all experienced America's changing natural landscape as the integrity of our forests, seacoasts, and river valleys succumbs to strip malls, new roads, and subdivisions. Too often, we assume that when land is developed it is forever lost to the natural world--or hope that a patchwork of local conservation strategies can somehow hold up against further large-scale development. In *Cities in the Wilderness*, Bruce Babbitt makes the case for why we need a national vision of land use. We may have a space program, he points out, but here at home we don't have an open-space policy that can balance the needs for human settlement and community with those for preservation of the natural world upon which life depends. Yet such a balance, the author demonstrates, is as remarkably achievable as it is necessary. This is no call for developing a new federal bureaucracy; Babbitt shows instead how much can be--and has been--done by making thoughtful and beneficial use of laws and institutions already in place. A hallmark of the book is the author's ability to match imaginative vision with practical understanding. Babbitt draws on his extensive experience to take us behind the scenes negotiating the Florida Everglades restoration project, the largest ever authorized by Congress. In California, we discover how the Endangered Species Act, still one of the most effective laws governing land use, has been employed to restore regional habitat. In the Midwest, we see how new World Trade Organization regulations might be used to help restore Iowa's farmlands and rivers. As a key architect of many environmental success stories, Babbitt reveals how broad restoration projects have thrived through federal- state partnership and how their principles can be extended to other parts of the country. Whether writing of land use as reflected in the Gettysburg battlefield, the movie Chinatown, or in presidential political strategy, Babbitt gives us fresh insight. In this inspiring and informative book, Babbitt sets his lens to panoramic--and offers a vision of land use as grand as the country's natural heritage. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

## **Book Information**

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## Customer Reviews

A classic--everyone should read this.

I purchased this book for a class, and it was very good. Babbitt is a good writer and it's not the first book I've read by him.

Finally, an environmental book that offers a clear alternative to misty-eyed, ain't-that-wondrous, nature books and apocalyptic, end-of-the-world environmental wake-up calls. As well laid-out as a textbook, it describes five regions of the country in various stages of environmental decay, the pragmatic steps taken to restore them, the political forces at play, and the actual results of the efforts. Non-ideological in tone, the book draws the reader into each situation by describing the environmental stakes, but the real payoff is the fascinating details about how major environmental advances are actually put together. One of the surprises for this reviewer is the ambivalent role played by environmental groups, who appear often as antagonists to the final deal; another was the minimal amount of criticism of the current administration, with even that amount given with more sorrow than venom. But perhaps I should have expected that; the author is too busy convincing us of his vision of ecosystem management using Federal land-use policy to be distracted by cheap score-settling. And lest phrases like "Federal land-use policy" make this book sound like a think-tank report, the sweeping descriptions of our American lands and how we use them were gorgeous, and reminiscent of the best writings of Aldo Leopold. There were a few topics I wish the author could have covered. His book illustrates again and again the importance of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in motivating land-use agreements; more discussion of the growing property rights movement and its attempts to change the ESA would have been topical. And given the ambivalent role played by environment groups, discussion of the best and worst of them, and how they could better achieve their goals, would have been useful. But overall, it was a great and refreshing read; it's

about time for an environmental book to offer us, not just a tour of the troubles, but a clear and compelling path to get beyond them.

This is a fantastic book: a look backward at what large-scale land preservation projects have and haven't worked, and a look forward at what we need to do, as a country, to protect and preserve the land. And it isn't a dry tome. Babbitt can actually write: the book is full of compelling, dramatic stories. There aren't many figures on the environmental scene who command national attention, and Babbitt is one of them. He put his stamp on the Clinton era's efforts to make a difference in land preservation, and his book is a fascinating glimpse into how that all happened -- and how we can continue to craft, with the engaged participation of the feds, new projects that keep the wilderness wild. There probably isn't anyone better qualified than Babbitt to give the 30,000-foot perspective on how the messy arts of environmental protection and politics combine. He talks about projects in New Jersey, in Florida, in the Midwest, in the Southwest, in the Northwest -- the guy has clearly spent a lot of time thinking about what's in common among the Everglades, the Pine Barrens, the Colorado desert, etc. And what they have in common -- the successful projects, that is -- is a coming-together of many diverse interests that are willing to fight it out as they lurch towards their goal of protecting tens or hundreds of thousands of acres. A central question of the book is why we don't demand that the federal government be thinking about, and engaged in, land use. As he says, we already have a federal role in land use policy, it's just that we call it the National Parks system, or the Army Corps of Engineers, or federal dollars to rebuild, etc. What we need is a pro-active, forward-looking federal position, rather than a reactive, responsive one. This is an important book, and a fun one to read.

I have just finished reading *Cities in the Wilderness: A New Vision of Land Use in America* (Island Press), a collection of five essays book-ended by a prologue and epilogue by former Arizona governor and Secretary of Interior Bruce Babbitt. I was initially interested in the book because Babbitt will be the featured interview in the next issue of *Terrain.org: A Journal of the Built & Natural Environments* [...] due out March 5, 2006. Now, I am utterly fascinated, as it weaves together stories---in the manner of case studies but not nearly as dry---set in a historical context of federal, state, and local government "partnerships," seemingly by chance but more often carefully crafted, for environmental preservation. Its call is simple: There must be a federal presence, in the form of legislation, for large-scale preservation efforts: there must be a federal land use policy. Many of the laws already exist, such as the Endangered Species Act, but a more comprehensive, holistic effort

is clearly needed. And such movement cannot wait until the current administration is gone, even if the Bush administration has done more to undo all environmental safeguards than any other presidency in our nation's history. So the topic is intriguing, the stories are powerful, but more so: Babbitt's writing is surprisingly good. Readers at all levels will appreciate and be won over by his subtle eloquence and no-nonsense grace. I'd go so far as to say that this book should be required reading not only for all lawmakers, but for all environmental advocates, property rights advocates, farmers, ranchers, miners, energy developers, and those interested in such: pretty much everyone with a stake or interest in land and water. That should probably be all of us. It's a fairly quick read---only 288 pages, which includes plenty of references and other resources. You will of course want to read the interview in Terrain.org's next issue, but don't wait until then to get this important book!

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