The Klamath Mountains: A Natural History

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BOOK REVIEW

Michael Kauffmann and Justin Garwood, editors. 2022. Backcountry Press, Kneeland, CA, USA. 496 pages (hardcover). $54.95. ISBN 978-1-941624-09-08

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Anyone who has spent time in the Klamath Mountains region has experienced the enigmatic beauty of this complex landscape. In their collaborative new book, the *Klamath Mountains: A Natural History*, editors Kauffmann and Garwood bring together a team of experts—34 authors in all—to tell stories of the people, processes, and organisms that have shaped this under-appreciated region defined by ancient geology and unique lifeforms.

This natural history book presents readers with a comprehensive guide to three main topics: cultural history, abiotic processes that have shaped the landscape, and the diversity of plants, animals, and fungi that call this region home. The book begins with an overview of the First Peoples that have inhabited the area for at least 9,000 years. This section highlights their cultural traditions, including indigenous fire stewardship, agroforestry practices, and traditional uses and cultural significance of wildlife. The book's next chapters describe how geology, climate, hydrology, and fire shape the physical landscape and ecological processes across dramatic topographic relief spanning over 2,700 m (9,000 ft) in elevation and from the rain-soaked coast to arid inland rain shadows. Finally, the book ends with a comprehensive set of chapters covering fungi, lichen, plants, forest insects and pathogens, and a wide spectrum of invertebrates and vertebrates in terrestrial and aquatic environments.

While each chapter is unique in topic and author, similar elements give the book a cohesive feel. Delightful vignettes dive deep into specific topics such as the loss of meadows to conifer encroachment, fairy shrimp in snow melt vernal pools, and the hidden life of beavers in Klamath Mountain streams. Richly drawn maps provide the geographic context in each chapter, and illustrated diagrams help explain complex processes and relationships such as the formation of fens, bird species distribution in various plant communities, and coniferous trees across elevational and climatic gradients in the region. The book provides classic general life history descriptions of taxonomic groups in the context of local landscapes that enriches the reader with place-based knowledge resulting in a much deeper understanding of the collective landscape and its diversity.

Few natural histories have ever achieved the level of accuracy and detail for a region that this book does. Natural history books are often written by one or just a few authors. This project took a unique approach of enlisting numerous subject matter experts, so each topic is thoroughly covered. The comprehensiveness of each chapter comes from the effort and passion of the authors and a long-tern dedication to this project from the editors. When taken together, this book is a significant

accomplishment.

Kauffmann and Garwood argue that understanding a landscape requires knowledge of how geology, climate, fire, and soils interact to connect all living things across space and time. This book allows readers to achieve this understanding by highlighting the interconnectedness among topics and encouraging readers to appreciate the complexities that make this landscape unique. Readers will foster a deep connection to the Klamath Mountains through the lens of natural history. All naturalists will love this beautiful book, and even the most experienced will learn something new about this richly diverse region.

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