

2022 ENVIRONMENTAL READING LIST

NON-FICTION

[My Work is That of Conservation: An Environmental Biography of George Washington Carver](#) by Mark D. Hersey (2011)

Hersey shows that in the hands of pioneers like Carver, Progressive Era agronomy was actually considerably "greener" than is often thought today. *My Work Is That of Conservation* uses Carver's life story to explore aspects of southern environmental history and to place this important scientist within the early conservation movement.

[The Alchemy of Air: A Jewish Genius, A Doomed Tycoon, and the Discovery That Changed the Course of History](#) by Thomas Hager (2008)

Around the turn of the century, the world faced a shortage of the fixed nitrogen needed to provide food for a growing population. Hager sets the stage by describing the world's reliance in the 19th century on nitrates from Peru and Chile that could be used as natural fertilizer or to make gunpowder, and finds plenty of human drama in the battles to control the lucrative international trade.

[Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History](#) by Robin Wall Kimmerer (2003)

What might seem a dull topic (how much can a single-celled organism do) becomes an interwoven story of evolution, growth, and analogs to human societies. Kimmerer has talent in weaving literary quality writing with scientific and ecological education to help the reader see everything she does in her studies of some of our smallest yet widest-spread plants.

[Flowers for Elephants: How a Conservation Movement in Kenya Offers Lessons for us All](#) by Peter Martell (2022)

When northern Kenyans find elephant bones, they lay down blossoms and branches as a mark of respect, honouring their crucial connection with the wildlife they live alongside. From tracking elephants through the bush to gun battles with bandits and treks through Al-Qaeda territory, Peter Martell tells the exciting story of a conservation movement that gives hope. At a time when humanity is reassessing its broken relationship with nature, these communities offer an inspirational blueprint, proving that environmental change does not have to divide, but can bring us together.

[Spiritual Instructions: Indigenous Wisdom for Living Spirit-Based Change](#) by Sherri Mitchell (2018)

Drawing from ancestral knowledge, as well as her experience as an attorney and activist, Sherri Mitchell addresses some of the most crucial issues of our day—including indigenous land rights, environmental justice, and our collective human survival. Sharing the gifts she has received from the elders of her tribe, the Penobscot Nation, she asks us to look deeply into the illusions we have labeled as truth and which separate us from our higher mind and from one another. Side note: Mitchell is an open opponent of carbon and blue carbon credits, a conservation strategy TNC has openly embraced; for this alone this book piqued my interest.

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Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants by Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013)

Drawing on her life as an indigenous scientist, mother and woman, Kimmerer shows how other living beings—plants and animals—offer us gifts and lessons, even if we've forgotten how to hear their voices. In a rich braid of reflections she circles toward a central argument: that the awakening of a wider ecological consciousness requires the acknowledgment and celebration of our reciprocal relationship with the rest of the living world. For only when we can hear the languages of other beings will we be capable of understanding the generosity of the earth, and learn to give our own gifts in return.

Kon-Tiki: Across the Pacific in a Raft by Thor Heyerdahl (1948)

The record of an astonishing adventure—a journey of 4,300 nautical miles across the Pacific Ocean by raft. Intrigued by Polynesian folklore, biologist Thor Heyerdahl suspected that the South Sea Islands had been settled by an ancient race from thousands of miles to the east, led by a mythical hero, Kon-Tiki. He decided to prove his theory by duplicating the legendary voyage.

Bird Brother: A Falconer's Journey and the Healing Power of Wildlife by Rodney Stotts, contribution by Kate Pipkin (2022)

To escape the tough streets of Southeast Washington, D.C. in the late 1980s, young Rodney Stotts would ride the metro to the Smithsonian National Zoo. There, the bald eagles and other birds of prey captured his imagination for the first time. Rodney shares his unlikely journey to becoming a conservationist and one of America's few Black master falconers.

The Overstory by Richard Powers (2019)

A sweeping, impassioned work of activism and resistance that is also a stunning evocation of—and paean to—the natural world. From the roots to the crown and back to the seeds, Richard Powers' twelfth novel unfolds in concentric rings of interlocking fables that range from antebellum New York to the late twentieth-century Timber Wars of the Pacific Northwest and beyond. Winner of the 2019 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction.

After the Blast: The Ecological Recovery of Mount St. Helens by Eric Wagner (2020)

On May 18, 1980, people all over the world watched with awe and horror as Mount St. Helens erupted. Fifty-seven people were killed and hundreds of square miles of what had been lush forests and wild rivers were, to all appearances, destroyed. When forest scientist Jerry Franklin helicoptered into the blast area a couple of weeks after the eruption, he found small plants bursting through the ash and animals skittering over the ground. Stunned, he realized he and his colleagues had been thinking of the volcano in completely the wrong way. Rather than being a dead zone, the mountain was very much alive.

The Amur River: Between Russia and China by Colin Thubron (2021)

An eye-opening, often perilous journey along a little known Far East Asian river that for over a thousand miles forms the highly contested border between Russia and China.

Fuzz: When Nature Breaks the Law by Mary Roach (2021)

What's to be done about a jaywalking moose? A bear caught breaking and entering? A murderous tree? Three hundred years ago, animals that broke the law would be assigned legal representation and put on trial. The answers are best found not in jurisprudence but in science: the curious science of human-wildlife conflict, a discipline at the crossroads of human behavior and wildlife biology.

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Islands of Abandonment by Cal Flynn (2021)

Visit the most eerie and desolate places on Earth that, due to war, disaster, disease or economic decay, have been abandoned by humans. What Flynn finds every time is an 'island' of teeming new life: nature has rushed in to fill the void faster and more thoroughly than even the most hopeful projections of scientists.

The Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire That Saved America by Timothy Egan (2009)

The true story of the Great Fire of 1910, which burned 3 million acres in Idaho, Montana, Washington and British Columbia, and is believed to be the largest wildfire in United States history. Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Timothy Egan describes the newly created United States Forest Service effort to stop the fire and details President Teddy Roosevelt's conservation battles with Congress.

All We Can Save: Truth, Courage and Solutions for the Climate Crisis, edited by Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, PhD and Katharine Wilkinson, PhD (2020)

Provocative and illuminating essays from women at the forefront of the climate movement who are harnessing truth, courage and solutions to lead humanity forward.

The Future We Choose: The Stubborn Optimist's Guide to the Climate Crisis by Christiana Figueres and Tom Rivett-Carnac (2021)

A cautionary but optimistic book about the world's changing climate and the fate of humanity from lead negotiators for the United Nations during the historic Paris Agreement of 2015.

To Be a Water Protector: The Rise of the Wiindigoo Slayers by Winona LaDuke (2020)

An expansive, provocative engagement with issues that have been central to her many years of activism. LaDuke honours Mother Earth and her teachings while detailing global, Indigenous-led opposition to the enslavement and exploitation of the land and water. She discusses several elements of a New Green Economy and outlines the lessons we can take from activists outside the US and Canada.

Chesapeake Requiem: A Year with the Watermen of Vanishing Tangier Island by Earl Swift (2018)

An intimate look at the island's past, present and tenuous future, by an acclaimed journalist who spent two years living among Tangier's people—crabbing and oystering with its watermen and observing its long traditions and odd ways. What emerges is the poignant tale of a world that has, quite nearly, gone by, and a leading-edge report on the coming fate of countless coastal communities.

Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions and Everyday Life by Karie Marie Norgaard (2011)

An analysis of why people with knowledge about climate change often fail to translate that knowledge into action.

Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right by Arlie Hochschild (2016)

Addressing a fundamental question—how can individuals and communities who have suffered from industrial production's environmental pollution also be ardent supporters of the expansion and de-regulation of these industries? The book focuses in particular on the white working class.

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The Parable of the Sower by Octavia E. Butler (2000)

When global climate change and economic crises lead to social chaos in the early 2020s, California becomes full of dangers, from pervasive water shortage to masses of vagabonds who will do anything to live to see another day. Fifteen-year-old Lauren Olamina lives inside a gated community with her preacher father, family and neighbors, sheltered from the surrounding anarchy. In a society where any vulnerability is a risk, she suffers from hyperempathy, a debilitating sensitivity to others' emotions. What begins as a fight for survival soon leads to something much more: the birth of a new faith, and a startling vision of human destiny.

The Night Watchman by Louise Erdrich (2020)

Based on the extraordinary life of National Book Award-winning author Louise Erdrich's grandfather who worked as a night watchman and carried the fight against Native dispossession from rural North Dakota all the way to Washington, D.C. This powerful novel explores themes of love and death with lightness and gravity and unfolds with the elegant prose, sly humor and depth of feeling of a master craftsman. Winner of the 2021 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

Broken Earth Trilogy by NK Jemison (2015)

A season of endings has begun. It starts with the great red rift across the heart of the world's sole continent, spewing ash that blots out the sun. It starts with death, with a murdered son and a missing daughter. It starts with betrayal, and long dormant wounds rising up to fester. A three part science-fiction series comprising *The Fifth Season*, *The Obelisk Gate* and *The Stone Sky*.

The Four Winds by Kristin Hannah (2021)

Texas, 1934. Millions are out of work and a drought has broken the Great Plains. Farmers are fighting to keep their land and their livelihoods as the crops are failing, the water is drying up and dust threatens to bury them all. One of the darkest periods of the Great Depression—the Dust Bowl era—has arrived with a vengeance. An indelible portrait of America and the American Dream, as seen through the eyes of one indomitable woman whose courage and sacrifice will come to define a generation.

Arrow by Samantha M. Clark (2021)

A boy who has grown up as the only human in an enchanted rainforest and what happens when people from the outside world discover his home.

The Book of Eels: Our Enduring Fascination with the Most Mysterious Creature in the Natural World by Patrik Svensson (2020)

Eels, both American and European, have been a mystery for centuries. They even befuddled the young biologist Sigmund Freud as their reproductive cycle has been unknown yet thoroughly studied and is still somewhat in question. Svensson blends natural history with recollections of his childhood fishing for these cryptic creatures.