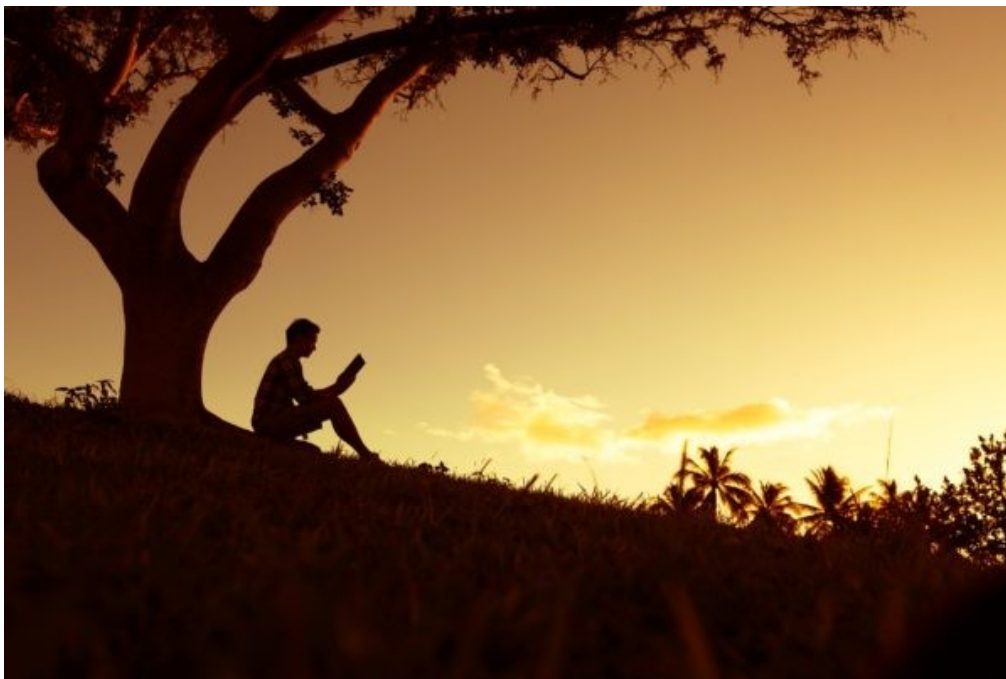


# Summer Reading: Dig Into the Roots of Environmental Nonfiction | Earth911.com

## Summer Reading: Dig Into the Roots of Environmental Nonfiction



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Half a century ago, we didn't know the full impact of what we were doing to the environment. But even then there were people who knew our actions were unsustainable.

Those prescient voices gave us warning, and now we know they were right. If you want to understand how environmentalism became a household word, read the classics of environmental literature. Consider the following list of classic nonfiction your self-education curriculum on the roots of American environmentalism.

### **Walden**

Henry David Thoreau (1854)

The foundational text of American environmental writing, [Walden](#) is a memoir of a social experiment that declared our civilization was going off course. Although the Victorian-era language can be a challenge to modern readers, Walden is the root from which all later conservation writing grows.

### **A Sand County Almanac**

Aldo Leopold (1949)

Part seasonal observation, part essay selection, Aldo Leopold's classic [Sand County Almanac](#) was one of the first publications to crystallize environmental concepts like conservation and "land ethic" for a generation of readers.

### **Silent Spring**

Rachel Carson (1962)

[Silent Spring](#) was not the first environmental nonfiction published in America, and it has been followed by literally dozens more. But to this day, it is arguably still the most well-known and most effective of the genre. Silent Spring led directly to the banning of DDT. It spurred changes to environmental laws that remain our best defense against pollution and climate change. For many people, environmental issues are still defined by the persistent, toxic chemicals described in Rachel Carson's scrupulously researched book.

### **Encounters with the Arch Druid**

John McPhee (1972)

Developed from a New Yorker profile, [Encounters with the Arch Druid](#) follows environmentalist David Brower as he challenges three men engaged in destructive developmental practices in three very different biomes. The drama takes place on the Colorado River prior to the Glen Canyon Dam and one of them, a resort developer, provided the book's title when he claimed conservationists are druids who "sacrifice people and worship trees."

### **The Unsettling of America**

Wendell Berry, (1977)

Beloved for his fiction, Wendell Berry also has an extensive back catalogue of nonfiction, including the classic [The Unsettling of America](#) in which he critiques industrial farming, treating both the environmental and spiritual impacts of estranging society from the direct care of the earth.

### **Biophilia**

Edward O. Wilson (1984)

In his best known and most personal book, [Biophilia](#), Edward O. Wilson argues that our natural affinity for life — biophilia — is the very essence of our humanity and binds us to all other living species.

### **Cadillac Desert**

Marc Reisner (1986)

Eleven years after the novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang* linked the destructive power of development in the American West to water issues in the popular mind, Reisner published his results from a decade of research in [Cadillac Desert](#). Equal parts history and expose, Cadillac Desert reveals the billion-dollar water-rights battles and the ecological and economic disasters upon which the urban West is built.

### **Earth in the Balance**

Al Gore (1992)

Perhaps not as well-known as *An Inconvenient Truth*, *Earth in the Balance* is the earliest of Gore's environmental nonfiction books. Prior to this book, most people thought of environmental issues as discrete topics, usually specific to individual locations. [Earth in the Balance](#) is one of the first books to consider the global implications of environmental destruction.

What are your favorite works of environmental nonfiction? Share your comments with the community in the [Earthing Forum](#).

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