

# NATURE WARS



**Jim Sterba's *Nature Wars***

***Nature Wars* addresses the issues modern Americans have faced recently when they have brought certain species back from extinction.**

Now these species overpopulate the area and encroach upon highly habituated areas, but who is encroaching upon who? Sterba focuses on a number of species as an example of this encroachment – beavers, wild turkeys, white tail deer, grizzly bears, Canada geese and even feral cats – which, in modern times, have become more of a burden than a blessing for Americans.

**Even though many Americans live in urbanized areas and have become desensitized from nature and all its glory,** Sterba argues that Americas are still forest dwellers. “Nearly 204 million, or two-thirds of the population of 308.7 million [live in forested areas] in 2010. That number includes everyone, rural and urban. If you subtract the 23 million people who live in the twenty largest eastern cities, you are left with about 179 million, or 58.2 percent of the total U.S. population – still a clear majority. Most of those people live among a lot of trees but not in what would traditionally be called a forest. Sprawl, for example, can include suburbs, golf courses, cropland, pasture, parks...Yet areas of sprawl...are so covered with trees that they have the feel of a forest.”

According to the book and its author, this **“forest dwelling” has lead to years of friction between man and nature** – first we drive certain species near extinction only to bring them back to be put into harm’s way in modern times. This modern day extinction can be traced back to the arrival of the Europeans on North American soil, which Sterba states, “...the consequences were eventually catastrophic to wildlife. The fishermen, explorers, and traders who came in the

sixteenth century established barter relationships with Indians eager to exchange beaver pelts, deer hides, and other furs they had in abundance for an array of manufactured products...

An example of near extinction is the beaver, which was all but wiped out in Massachusetts by 1750.

"But by 2002, beavers were very much back – an estimated seventy thousand of them, and counting. This meant more people and beavers living together than at any time in the state's history...and as beaver populations grew they became one of the most problematic wild animals Americans have had to deal with," states Sterba.

The main reason for this love-hate relationship is wood and water – both man and beaver enjoy living by the water – in the beaver's case, it has to live in the water because that is where they build their home. But, wood serves dual purposes – for man it's the source we use to construct our homes; for beavers it's their source of food.

And then there's Canada geese – the birds everyone loves to hate. Thought near extinction, it was the discovery of the *Branta canadensis maxima* in January 1962 near Silver Lake in Rochester, Minn., which "...energized wildlife agents and researchers" because of this species' girth and endurance.

But, Sterba explains, "While goose restoration efforts were going on, the American population was sprawling out across the suburban, exurban, and rural landscape, creating ...an almost perfect ecological niche in which goose populations could explode. To accommodate these people, developers turned millions of acres of farmland and woods into lawns, ponds, golf courses...all planted in what happened to be the favorite food of Canada geese: grass."

Over the decades the Canada geese population grew, creating a battle between those who wanted to get rid of these pests and those who were trying to save them, but not until January 15, 2009 when US Airways Flight 1549 sucked geese into both engines and had to abort its flight and land in the Hudson River, did the public really become aware of the dangers of the Canada geese overpopulation.

These battles between man and creature can be blamed on the fact that early conservationist hadn't envisioned sprawl.

"This [the sprawl of the 1970s and 1980s] was a new arrangement for man, beast, and tree...in just a few decades, we have seen an integration of forests, wild animals and birds, and people on a scale and in numbers that are unique," states Sterba.

In conclusion, Sterba explains North Americans need to reconnect with nature and become involved in our ecosystems again and enjoying the great outdoors and appreciating nature.

– Article/Review by Lara Jackson