



The Myth of Progress: Toward a Sustainable Future

By Tom Wessels

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In this compelling and cogently argued book, Tom Wessels demonstrates how our current path toward progress, based on continual economic expansion and inefficient use of resources, runs absolutely contrary to three foundational scientific laws that govern all complex natural systems. It is a myth, he contends, that progress depends on a growing economy. Wessels explains his theory with his three Laws of Sustainability: the law of limits to growth, the second law of thermodynamics, which exposes the dangers of increased energy consumption, and the law of self-organization, which results in the marvelous diversity of such highly evolved systems as the human body and complex ecosystems. These laws, scientifically proven to sustain life in its myriad forms, have been cast aside since the eighteenth century, first by western economists, political pragmatists, and governments attracted by the idea of unlimited growth, and more recently by a global economy dominated by large corporations, in which consolidation and oversimplification create large-scale inefficiencies in material and energy usage. Wessels makes scientific theory readily accessible by offering examples of how the Laws of Sustainability function in the complex systems we can observe in the natural world around us. He shows how systems such as forests can be templates for developing sustainable economic practices that will allow true progress. Demonstrating that all environmental problems have their source in the Myth of Progress's disregard for the Laws of Sustainability, he concludes with an impassioned argument for cultural change.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Wessels writes that people with a richness of life created through their connections with community, place and themselves have no need to compulsively consume the "frivolous accoutrements that we tend to think of as making us happy, but which really don't." Wessels' wisdom in *The Myth of Progress* provides much more than just a warning about the damage we are doing to our biosphere. It also helps us to see the damage we may be doing to our very souls."--People's Voice Magazine

"This is a short, often pithy book, and you can easily read it in an evening. In this way, it serves multiple purposes. It is a fine refresher or overview for people who are either new to this material or who haven't thought about it in a long time. It's perfect for folks who lack a science background and wish to better understand the relationship between ecological and economic systems. It is a valuable teaching tool that covers these basic principles in a simple, no-nonsense way. Most importantly, it retains all of Wessel's charm as a writer and educator. Indeed, the book's most riveting passages are his anecdotes and examples . . . This is an impassioned, critical, and bold book. Wessels is guided by his overwhelming sense that the laws of sustainability demand respect, understanding, and interpretation, and unless we educate ourselves about their full complexity and truth, we will do irreparable damage to the landscapes we love."--Northern Woodlands

"In this extended essay on sustainable development, Wessels challenges a conventional understanding of economic progress by posing a series of dichotomous worldviews, including linear versus complex systems and unfettered growth versus sustainability. . . . An interesting and challenging overview of environmental concerns, the book provides a sober and thoughtful . . . look at a serious long-term issue. Recommended."--Choice

About the Author

TOM WESSELS is a professor of ecology and the founding director of the Master's degree program in Conservation Biology at Antioch New England Graduate School. His books include *Untamed Vermont* (Thistle Hill Publications, distributed by UPNE, 2003), *The Granite Landscape: A Natural History of America's Mountain Domes from Acadia to Yosemite* (2001), and *Reading the Forested Landscape: A Natural History of New England* (1997).

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