

# Researcher's new book reveals environmental history of New York

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A new book reveals the environmental history of New York state, including lessons learned from environmental disasters, triumphs in conservation efforts and balancing tourism with preserving natural wonders. The book also reveals the state's environmental threats that remain today. David Stradling, a University of Cincinnati professor of history, will be visiting New York this month as a featured author for his new book, "The Nature of New York – An Environmental History of the Empire State," published by Cornell University Press. The book holds an eight-page color insert and maps.

Stradling says exploring the environmental history of the Empire State was an exciting challenge because of the complexities of New York's environmental history – from its creation of Central Park that served as a model for landscaped parks across the United States to the horrors of the Love Canal disaster that made national headlines in the late 1970s.

"These are events that are not only important to the history of the state itself, but they're also representative of the trends in the environmental history of the nation as a whole, Stradling says.

The history follows events such as New York's creation of a comprehensive state park system – one of the first states to do so back in the 1920s. Stradling also credits the Empire State as being among the earliest participants in the so-called limited highway movement, creating parkways that bypassed New York City.

The book explores New York's efforts to preserve Niagara Falls as a natural wonder in a region that was drawing cheap hotels and souvenir shops; the replenishing of forests after woodlands were virtually wiped out by the pulp industry; and the creation of wilderness areas in the Adirondacks.

"Although we tend not to think of New York – with Wall Street and the banks – as an industrial city anymore, New York was by far the nation's largest industrial city at the turn of the 20th century. It's no accident that New York City and New York State became leaders in progressive reform to overcome the challenges of urbanization and industrialization," Stradling says.

He adds that those challenges led to New York's creation of the first comprehensive zoning law in the country, in which the state cracked down on tenement housing at the turn of the 20th century.

Stradling ends the book by examining New York's environmental challenges today – concerns that run beyond the state's borders. "New York State faced a serious threat from acid rain in the 1980s, and much of the problem was from outside the State of New York. So, the people of New York had to come together as an active environmental community to pass national legislation to combat acid rain. The same issue is happening now with global warming," Stradling says.

Stradling has taught urban and environmental history at UC for a decade. He is also author of "Making Mountains: New York City and the Catskills," published by the University of Washington Press in 2007.

Stradling is currently at work on researching the Cuyahoga River and industrial Cleveland.

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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