



A Primer on Natural Resource Science

Fred S. Guthery

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In wildlife, fisheries, forestry, and range management departments around the country, natural resource scientists and their students advance understanding of the natural world largely through the collection and analysis of data. These students learn how to acquire data in the field and analyze them using modeling and other statistical methods.

What they do not learn, contends author Fred S. Guthery, is what science means as an intellectual pursuit and where natural resource science fits in the scientific tradition. He argues that without education about the nature and philosophy of science, the wildlife field has become enamored with its methodologies at the expense of gaining real knowledge, leading to what some have characterized as “a crisis in how wildlife science is pursued.” With *A Primer on Natural Resource Science*, Guthery intends to put learning about the nature of science into the natural resource scientist’s university curriculum.

In the first part of the book, “Perspectives,” Guthery describes the principles of the scientific endeavor, discussing the nature of reasoning, of facts, of creativity and critical thinking. In the second part, “Practice,” he presents the “mechanics” of science, explaining the roles of experiment, observation, models, and statistics. He also demystifies the essential activity of publishing, telling students and researchers why they must do it and how to do it successfully.

Throughout the book, Guthery uses his long experience and the body of his own research to relate the philosophical underpinnings of science to the realities of field biology. By providing real-life examples in the practice of natural resource science, Guthery offers practical, occasionally painful, and sometimes humorous lessons on the human urge to know about nature through science.

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Aaron Tolleson:

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