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Peer reviewed

**Review: The Conservation Program Handbook: A Guide for Local Government Land Acquisition**

By Sandra Tassel

Reviewed by Elery Hamilton-Smith

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Tassel, Sandra. *The Conservation Program Handbook: A Guide for Local Government Land Acquisition*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2011. xvi + 245 pp. ISBN: 9781597266666. US\$35.00, paperback. Alkaline paper.

The author and her many colleagues have based this book upon "case studies" of public lands acquisition and management at the local level either by or on behalf of local government. At intervals there are chapters which examine and conceptualize important aspects of the processes involved and thus integrate the learning from the various examples.

There are also a number of sidebar reminders of particularly important principles:

- Programs used as models by new programs may not be the best ones to emulate
- At the very start of designing the program policies, you need to decide when commitments can be made
- The objectivity of numeric ranking is actually an illusion unless every element of your rating system can be reduced to a yes or no question or measured quantitatively

The clarity of the text is indeed one of the best features of the book as a whole. Newcomers to the land management process will find it easy to follow, yet at the same time dealing in real depth with the issues that arise in practice.

I can only recommend it very strongly to all those sharing in the on-ground process within the United States. However, it may be of less value outside of the USA as it relies upon the prevailing legal frameworks and processes of that country. Its clarity on dealing with issues is based in point-by-point descriptions of the ways in which these inevitably shape the way in which those involved can be efficient and effective. One very clear example of a complex but fundamentally area can be seen in Chapter viii (pp. 140-47) on due diligence.

So, outside of the American legal system it will be of value mainly to experienced planners and managers to identify the issues to which they must pay attention and so ensure that nothing is ignored or overlooked. But they will have to adapt or even develop the action to be taken within their own legal and managerial processes.

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