



Green in Gridlock: Common Goals, Common Ground, and Compromise (Kathie and Ed Cox Jr. Books on Conservation Leadership, sponsored by The Meadows)

Paul Walden Hansen

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Facing one of the most dangerous conservation crises in history—acid rain—lawmakers, industry leaders, and activists embraced an attitude of civil engagement that sought common ground and acceptance of compromise solutions on all sides. As a result, they achieved a spectacular outcome. This approach was also at work when another planet-threatening event—ozone depletion—was reversed.

In *Green in Gridlock*, Paul Walden Hansen, the former head of the Izaak Walton League, takes stock of what has been accomplished and what has been squandered in the many environmental contests in which he was involved during his forty-year career as a conservationist. In seeking to identify the strategies that worked and to pinpoint why progress on so many important issues never materialized, Hansen realized that the most important predictor of success or failure was the willingness of opposing interests to find common ground and to compromise in order to attain mutually important goals.

Polling demonstrates that, overwhelmingly, Americans care about the environment but are less enthusiastic about environmentalists. Accordingly, Hansen issues a pointed critique for activism of the “rather fight than win” variety. But he is also critical of conservative interests that oppose environmental legislation as a matter of principle while forgetting that a long string of cost-effective environmental legislation from the Clean Air Act to the Wilderness Act—was passed by overwhelming bipartisan margins and signed into law by Republican presidents in the 1970s. Hansen makes a convincing case that thinking and acting ideologically rather than strategically is ultimately bad for the environment.

More than a simplistic call for civility or yet another admonition that we all “work together,” this book offers practical lessons and a positive vision from a seasoned veteran on how to create support instead of opposition, how to recognize natural allies, and how to acknowledge common purpose in the name of progress.

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