Review by James M. Peek, Ph.D. <peek@uidaho.edu>

Professor of Wildlife Resources, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID 83844, USA. TEL: 208-885-7120.

Pielou, E.C. AFTER THE ICE AGE : THE RETURN OF LIFE TO GLACIATED NORTH AMERICA. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, 1992 paperback ed. 366 pp. US$13.95 paperback ISBN: 0-226-66812-6.

E.C. Pielou's descriptions of events on earth following the last maximum glacial advances of 20,000 years ago should dispel the notion that we live in a static world. It should cause the reader to ponder whether our contemporary society is structured to adapt as we inexorably advance towards the next ice age. As our lake shores change and our climate changes, are we short-sighted humans ready to adjust our lives to accommodate the future? And those of us who concern ourselves with conservation of natural resources: where do our activities, which are often centered on the short-term, fit into the long-term picture?

In AFTER THE ICE AGE : THE RETURN OF LIFE TO GLACIATED NORTH AMERICA, such thought-provoking issues are raised as Pielou guides us through the geological evidence, using examples from little-known and seemingly inconsequential species, extinct and extant. We learn of the Malankovich Cycle describing the earth's orbit around the sun, the climatic warming of 10,000 years ago, and the Little Ice Age of 1600 A.D. The Glacial Lakes Agassiz and McConnell are delineated on a map, and their influences on current landform and vegetation pattern, are narrated eloquently. Also, we discover how species like the northern pike are distributed in North America across many major drainages because of their ability to migrate when lakes at headwaters ebbed and flowed, causing them to drain in different directions. We marvel at the careful observation of such seemingly insignificant species as the foraminifera, floating single-celled organisms which have shells that become fossilized and sink into the lake sediments. Forams with right-coiled shells live in warm waters while the left-coiled varieties live in cold waters. Abrupt changes in the presence of these different forams in sea sediments signals changes in climate. The events surrounding the evolution of Glacial Lake Missoula, and the catastrophic floods that modified so much of the terrain in eastern Washington when the ice dams failed, are also covered. The volcanic eruptions and the huge deposits of ash, the major extinction of the large mammals and birds, and how aboriginal man must have occupied the land as it changed through long time spans, are all discussed in sufficient detail to enhance our understanding.

Each chapter of AFTER THE ICE AGE... is documented and a section on footnotes is included in the back. This book is highly recommended for those who are interested in the natural world and who wish to acquire a bit of humility and a unique perspective on how forces beyond our control will ultimately dictate the condition of our environment and our future.