

Global Ecology: Environmental Change and Social Flexibility



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| ISBN10: | 0415098858 |
| Author: | Vaclav Smil |
| Language | English |
| Genre: | Environment |
| Published: | December 6th 1993 by Routledge |
| Goodreads Rating: | 4.33 |
| ISBN13: | 9780415098854 |
| Pages: | 240 |

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"Global Ecology" argues that the magnitude and speed of global environmental change poses a threat for the continuation of life on this planet. Many aspects of this crisis are all too familiar to us: the destruction of tropical rainforests, the hole in the Antarctic ozone layer, desertification, and soil erosion. Yet we avoid the underlying challenge of a rapidly deteriorating ecological system and the breadth and complexity of the response that is required. Vaclav Smil evaluates the current state of knowledge concerning atmospheric change. Recognizing the limits of scientific studies and quantitative modeling, Smil analyzes the weaknesses and uncertainties of our environmental understanding and provides a discussion of the levels of food, energy, water and materials necessary to support a decent quality of life. This timely and crucial study explores the promises and problems of different paths towards global management. With a focus on the importance of flexible response, it provides an analysis of both social and environmental needs. It will further our understanding of biospheric change and of our abilities and weaknesses in managing the transition to a sustainable society.