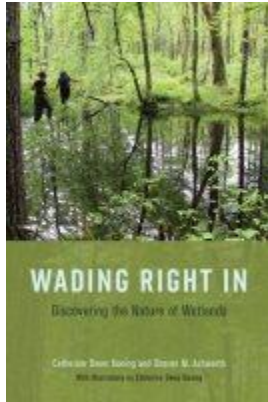


# Valuable Tool for Activists

April 18, 2020 Posted by [Katy Haas](#)



**Guest Post by Richie Swanson**

Ever dreamt of saving turtles squashed on highways? Of creating clean water and carbon sequestration? Of undoing the havoc humanity has wrought upon nature? Then read *Wading Right In*. It interprets crucial science for the layman and sometimes reads like a novel, depicting wetland-loving characters irrepressibly driven to protect nature. Some wetland lovers save and incubate eggs from road-killed diamondback turtles and release hatchlings into the wild. Another knocks on doors with a rare spadefoot toad in hand and convinces a landowner to conserve its habitat. Another invents tidal gates made of olive barrels to restore a city's impounded (and dying) saltmarshes. Others restore an eroding island, unloading 500 barges of sand and gravel by hand, growing their own native vegetation and enlisting 350 ninth graders to help plant a shoreline.

The wetland-loving scientists present themselves with humor. One describes sinking into freezing mud in the dark until a professor pulls her out. The book reveals nature's genius: a fishing spider the size of a human hand has a waxy coating and hairs on legs that allows it to zoom through water as it turns prey five times its weight into "a sushi smoothie." Wetland plants create their own air pipes and oxygen pumps, and beavers build mud piles and secrete scents that enable other beavers to know their nutritional health and kinship connections.

Authors Ashworth and Koning discuss the science of ecosystem services to assess mitigation, the legal process of compensating wetlands loss in one place by creating wetlands in another. The assessment involves water filtration, flood control, carbon storage, shoreline protection and species diversity—not dry details but valuable tools for activists. This book inspired me as much as Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson.

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*Wading Right In: Discovering the Nature of Wetlands* by Catherine Owen Koning and Sharon M. Ashworth. The University of Chicago Press, August 2019.

Reviewer bio: Richie Swanson's novel *First Territory* depicts the Yakama War 1855-56. His short stories about Indian-white relations and bird-related nonfiction are republished from journals at [richieswanson.com](http://richieswanson.com).

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