

LAST STAND: Ted Turner's Quest to Save a Troubled Planet

ADVANCE PRAISE

"LAST STAND is a great literary portrait of the many parts of a fascinating and important man – Ted Turner. Ted is on a mission to save the world and the world should be grateful to have an energetic and imaginative friend."

—Tom Brokaw, lead anchor emeritus NBC News and author of "The Greatest Generation"

"Ted Turner is one of the great originals of American history, an innovator of the first rank, and, as LAST STAND shows, a unique human innovation of his own making. Out of his many achievements, the most important may be the proof that capitalism and environmentalism can be joined to major humanitarian effect."

—Edward O. Wilson, University Research Professor Emeritus, Harvard University and two-time Pulitzer Prize winner

BOOK REVIEWS

KURKUS REVIEWS

Journalist Wilkinson (Science Under Siege: The Politicians' War on Nature and Truth, 1998) explores the back story of Ted Turner's evolution from media mogul and devotee of Ayn Rand to the most successful and influential green capitalist in the world.

The author unravels Turner's motives behind his involvement with the United Nations, his anti-nuclear stance, and his love of buffalos and prairie dogs, and he probes Turner's troubled family history through his early years as a striving businessman and media tycoon, revealing little known facets of Turner's complex life. Wilkinson constructs his narrative around interviews with Turner, his family and the multitude of individuals who have dealt with Turner. But the heart of the story chronicles Turner's evolving environmental consciousness, spurred on by his purchase of Hope Plantation in South Carolina in 1976. In 1987, he purchased his first ranch in Montana. Today, his "portfolio of land covers fifteen ranches, five plantations in the Deep South, a coastal barrier island, a trio of estancias in Argentina's Patagonia, a scattering of residential retreats, and an office building...in Atlanta." Turner's famed buffalo herd now stands at around 56,000 animals, making it the largest ever maintained by one person. Under the auspices of the Turner Endangered Species Fund, a wide variety of at risk-species have gained protection on Turner's private holdings, and he has lent support for wildlife research around the globe. "[His] lands function as fountainheads of life," Wilkinson writes. Turner's burgeoning social and environmental ventures are based on his belief in the "triple bottom line," a combination of "financial balance sheets, protection of the environment, and benefits to local and larger communities."

A well-wrought portrait of a visionary side of Ted Turner that may be unfamiliar to many readers.

BOOKLIST

If Ted Turner were a superhero, as befits the extraordinary daring and scope of his singular, under-the-radar achievements, his powers would involve shape-shifting, controversy-igniting, strategic charisma, and making and giving away epic sums of money. Turner's philanthropic innovation and zeal led him to fund the work of his great mentor, Jacques Cousteau; bolster the UN; found an organization devoted to eliminating nuclear weapons; support clean water and sustainable energy initiatives; and restore and preserve vast ecosystems and diverse endangered species. Journalist Wilkinson first interviewed Turner in 1992, when the ecohumanitarian, a restless man of high curiosity, "expansive thinking," and bold action, was newly married to Jane Fonda and busy with his now-famous bison herd on his majestic Montana ranch. For all his telegenic brashness, Turner is profoundly private. But he came to trust Wilkinson, and the result is this diligently detailed, keenly interpreted, and jaw-dropping portrait of a smart, prescient, independent man hard-driven by sorrow and passionately committed to doing lasting good in the world on as large a scale as possible. Wilkinson is the first to disclose the tragic story of Turner and his father and how the solace Turner has always found in nature, coupled with his momentous realization that "he could only save himself by helping others," inspires his phenomenal, world-altering environmental efforts. — *Donna Seaman*

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

In this fascinating, subject-approved biography of entrepreneur and CNN founder Ted Turner, journalist Wilkinson (*Science under Siege: the Politicians' War on Nature and Truth*)—who has covered Turner extensively since 1992—examines the billionaire's life. While the author weaves in such topics as Turner's rocky relationship with his suicidal father and his much-ballyhooed marriage to Jane Fonda—the focus here is on Turner's surprising devotion to the environment. Ranging from his concern about endangered species such as prairie dogs to instilling an appreciation of philanthropy in his five children, Turner walks the walk of his beliefs. Engaging stories about Turner's interactions with such dignitaries as former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev show him in a rarified yet relatable light. For anyone who thinks they know the man once dubbed the "Mouth of the South," this book proves there are unplumbed depths to this septuagenarian.

THE ATLANTAN

Just in time for Earth Day, journalist Todd Wilkinson reports on an Atlanta media mogul's massive efforts to protect the planet.

Environmental journalist Todd Wilkinson has covered eco-warriors from coast to coast, "but no one comes close to amassing the record of Ted Turner," he admits. In *Last Stand: Ted Turner's Quest to Save a Troubled Planet* (\$27, Lyons Press) out this month, Wilkinson exposes what the mystifying eco-capitalist has been up to out West for all these years. "If Atlantans think that he's been enigmatic in media—building a sports team into World Series champions and touting his

love of the Big Peach—his legacy as a pioneering eco-capitalist-humanitarian will drop some jaws,” he maintains.

Wilkinson first met Turner 20 years ago when he was assigned to write a story about the Southerner’s purchase of a large ranch outside of Bozeman, Mont.—where Turner previously stirred up controversy among the local cowboy community by replacing the beef cows with a herd of bison. Turner overcame the brouhaha and is now the second-largest private-property owner in America, and his herd numbers more than 55,000 animals—making it the largest ever maintained by one person. For research, the author then visited all 15 of Turner’s bison ranches and his three estancias in Argentina, which he employs as arks for saving imperiled species.

The book focuses on these massive eco-initiatives through a series of interviews with Turner and his inner circle. Wilkinson declares, “What I’m absolutely certain of is that *Last Stand* will cause Georgians to think differently about Ted.” He exposes largely unknown details about the tycoon, ranging from Turner’s troubled family history and his early years as a striving businessman, to his historic \$1 billion gift in support of the United Nations and his antinuclear stance. Mostly, Wilkinson explains Turner’s steadfast business belief in the “triple bottom line,” a combination of “financial balance sheets, protection of the environment and benefits to local and larger communities.” It is a profound portrait of Turner’s global legacy and a newsworthy report that will make all Atlantans proud to claim this local legend.

FLY ROD & REEL

By Ted Williams

I have a major problem with this new book by Todd Wilkinson, just published by Lyons Press. It is this: that he didn’t write it 25 years ago. That’s how long I’ve needed it.

This is Wilkinson at his finest (at that’s going a long distance). I consider it his most important work to date (and that also is going a long distance). Wilkinson is one journalist who gets what we and our planet face and who can write convincingly and prolifically about it.

As Turner himself notes in the foreword: “To set the context, imagine that it’s the bottom of the seventh inning and the home team--that’s the side playing for the preservation of Mother Nature and civilization--is down by a couple runs.

“The opposing team has an imposing lineup. The names on the backs of the jerseys are: Apathy, Cynicism, Greed, Sloth, Violence, Cruelty, Hatred, Intolerance, and Selfishness.

“All is not lost--yet--but in order to win...we can’t commit many more serious errors. Instead of doing dumb things, we need to play smarter because this is one game we can’t afford to lose.”

Ted Turner has repeatedly proven himself to be a national hero. Here's just one example: The westslope cutthroat, a race so distinct from the other major cutthroat groups that it could almost be thought of as a species, is in trouble. But thanks to Turner its future is far brighter than it otherwise would be.

Alas, he hasn't gotten much credit from sportsmen. They tend to be flimflammed by special interests and deceived by their own media. Consider the hissy fit they threw when Turner pledged to pick up most of the cost (ultimately \$750,000 of \$1 million) for cleansing the mongrel and alien trout from 77-mile Cherry Creek, a Madison River trib that runs through his Montana ranch. Today, thanks to Turner, Cherry Creek is America's biggest and most important westslope cutt sanctuary.

"Where you have genetically pure westslope cutthroats you have the only trout species that were in that region 200 years ago," says Pat Clancey, the dedicated biologist who led the Cherry Creek project for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. "We're losing places like that. But here's a case where, instead of trying to fend off cutthroat losses, we made a real significant gain."

One of the many times I needed Wilkinson's book was in June 1999 when *Outdoor Life* magazine ran an article with the inflammatory and misleading title "Playing God on Cherry Creek." The text, also inflammatory and almost entirely incorrect, relied heavily on sources bereft of scientific credentials (but not opinions). For example, the author stated that if a bear eats a fish poisoned with the organic, short-lived piscicides antimycin or rotenone that have never permanently affected an ecosystem other than to restore it, "it could become sick." Bears are sickened by all sorts of things--scraps of metal, birdseed and fermented apples, for instance. But if a bear has ever been sickened from eating a fish killed by piscicides, there is no record of it.

"Antimycin and rotenone will also exterminate the stream's aquatic insect populations," it asserted. "Neither piscicide has ever "exterminated" an insect population. In fact, these chemicals kill very few insects, and populations that are reduced recover in a few months usually in greater abundance because they are no longer stressed by alien predators. (Five years after the *Outdoor Life* screed and immediately after one Cherry Creek treatment Clancey's team observed caddis larvae happily feasting on the carcasses of poisoned fish.)

Outdoor Life went on to untruthfully report that "a lawsuit has been filed to halt the project on the grounds that it violates the federal Clean Water Act." Then in a grotesque mime of objective journalism, the editors invited readers to vote for or against the project. Surprise: 98 percent were opposed.

I needed Wilkinson's book again in the Winter of 2000 when *Range* magazine falsely accused the Forest Service, a partner in the Cherry Creek project, of "contradicting" the Wilderness Act. The act provides for exactly this sort of management. The article then falsely asserted that if even one of the grayling that were once stocked in Cherry Creek (and never again seen alive) turned up dead, the project "would be illegal on its face, directly afoul of the Endangered Species Act." Grayling weren't even listed.

Range reported that Fish, Wildlife and Parks failed to procure "a discharge permit that the Clean Water Act requires before any foreign 'pollutant' can be put into waters." But such permits aren't needed for chemical piscicides. The piece proclaimed that Cherry Creek "could be used as a natural hatchery, providing highly adapted eggs to help restore Yellowstone cutts to other, similarly demanding high-country environments." But the Yellowstone cutts in Cherry Creek were introgressed and didn't belong in this part of the state anyway.

When I asked Clancey why he hadn't explained all this to *Range* magazine he said that no one from the publication had ever contacted him or anyone else in the department. Instead, *Range* relied on rumors provided by the two maestros of opposition--property rights guru William Fairhurst and attorney Alan Joscelyn, who represented Montana's cyanide heap-leach mines.

First to attack Turner for the sin of exercising his property rights was, of all entities, a property-rights group--Fairhurst's Public Lands Access Association. Its failed state lawsuit (alleging that rotenone and antimycin are pollution) and its threatened federal lawsuit held up the restoration project for years.

One might have supposed that trout anglers would have been ecstatic at the prospect of saving the Westslope cutthroat. After all, westslope cutts evolved in this kind of water and therefore grow faster and bigger than the aliens. What's more, anglers are perfectly free to fish Cherry Creek provided they float it or use two essential pieces of outdoor equipment--their feet.

But there's a more important consideration than just catching fish. When a person fishes in degraded habitat for fish that don't belong, flyfishing is a mere "sport"--like bowling. When a person pursues wild, native fish in pristine habitat, flyfishing becomes more meaningful, and the fly-fisher is elevated to a participant in nature instead of being a mere taker. Todd Wilkinson and Ted Turner get this.

Like the people Turner bought his ranch from, he put up no-trespassing signs. Angry at the inconvenience of not being able to access the stream by motor vehicle, local guides and anglers spread the lie that Turner had thrown in with the Mountain States Legal Foundation to overturn Montana's stream access law.

Fly Rod & Reel wanted to set the record straight. To express our appreciation for Turner's efforts on behalf of the imperiled westslope cutt we made him our 2002 angler of the year, thereby unleashing the biggest blizzard of nastygrams we've received in our 34-year history. Most correspondents opened with harangues about Turner's liberal politics, as if this were somehow relevant. They then alleged that he's done nothing for fly-fishing. For too many fly-fishers the definition of doing something for fly-fishing isn't ensuring their sport by saving a part of earth's genetic wealth. It's inviting them to drive onto private property to angle for weed fish.

While we heard from Turner supporters, too, they were out-shouted. We were informed that we were "butt kissing," that we "might better have selected Osama bin Laden," that Turner "could care less about native trout...unless it might apply to his own delusional self-image, possible tax breaks or increased wealth," that he is a "land hoarder," a "terrorist," a "leftist elitist."

The angler of the year isn't picked by me, but somehow the choice of a native-fish-loving land poster was deemed my fault. My "selection" of Turner proved the following: I had "a political agenda," I'd done it for money, I was a "snot nose," a "moron," a "nature Nazi," an acolyte of "Hanoi Jane," an espouser of "vitriolic leftist environmentalism," a "nasty bully," "the James Carville of the fly-fishing

world."

"I see your magazine is lining up lock-step with the wild-animal-rights fly-fishing crowd that Left Wing Ted [Turner] leads and which appears to be taking over the leadership of Trout Unlimited and the Federation of Fly Fishers," wrote Bruce from Springdale, Pennsylvania. "I am completely opposed to the wild-at-any-cost perspective of this left-wing animal-rights crowd and to wit will...politically align myself with anti-wild-fish groups and politicians."

So all that is why I'm peeved that I didn't have Wilkinson's book to fling in the faces of all the ecological illiterates that I have heard from and am hearing from still.

However, as you'll note from the dust jacket photo, Wilkinson is young. When I first had need of "Last Stand--Ted Turner's Quest to Save a Troubled Planet" I was already older than he is now. Even Todd Wilkinson couldn't have produced this grand book back then. Today his youth, energy and commitment to wild things and wild places is needed as never before by this troubled planet.