

REVIEW OF**RONALD RUDIN, *AGAINST THE TIDES: RESHAPING LANDSCAPE AND COMMUNITY IN CANADA'S MARITIME MARSHLAND*.
VANCOUVER: UBC PRESS, 2021.****Sara Spike**

Against the Tides by Ronald Rudin joins a growing scholarly literature illuminating the histories and legacies of major environmental interventions by the Canadian state through the twentieth century. Drawing on the analytical framework of James C. Scott in *Seeing Like a State*, this historiography has teased out the tensions between local and expert knowledges in the development of modern infrastructure projects in a variety of Canadian contexts.

In *Against the Tides*, Rudin brings the reader to the centuries-old agricultural marshlands along the Bay of Fundy in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. These landscapes are characterized by a system of dykes and aboiteaux, the innovation of early Acadian settlers, which held back the tides, allowing the land to be drained and desalinated for arable fields. By the 1940s, these structures were in disrepair and farmers who relied on this artificial landscape were struggling. Here Rudin introduces the Maritime Marshlands Rehabilitation Administration (MMRA), established by the federal government in 1948, and tasked with improving the deteriorating dykelands. The book tells the story of this government agency and its work over the next two decades.

The dykelands of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia tend to be associated in the public imagination with the history of Acadian settlement. Indeed, efforts to commemorate this landscape, including a UNESCO World Heritage Site designation for the dykelands of Grand Pré, focus entirely on this early history of the land. However, with few exceptions, since the Deportation in 1755 to 1763, these lands have been owned and worked by English-speaking settlers and their descendants, who continue to steward these landscapes through practices of modern industrial agriculture.

Rudin does an excellent job of reminding the reader that this manufactured landscape has a many-layered history of intervention. He routinely asks us to reflect on the meaning of a “natural landscape” and reminds us that “a given landscape can be home to various forms of nature” (18). In fact, the book is structured around this premise. In part one, Rudin draws on William Cronin’s concept of “second nature” to describe the dykelands, first constructed by the Acadians, and maintained communally through the mid-twentieth century by settler farmers. Part two details “third nature,” the construction (and later decommissioning) of dams intended to reshape the lands once more.

Against the Tides neatly reveals how modern environmental management in the Maritimes was consistent with trends throughout North America in the mid- to late twentieth century. In part one, the postwar MMRA is an eastern counterpart to the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration in western Canada. As their names implied, their focus was on “rehabilitation,” which in the Maritimes meant the dual purposes of “restoration of the marshes and the re-education of the [farmers]” (58). Engineers and scientists from the MMRA incorporated the local knowledge of marsh owners in their efforts to rebuild dykes and aboiteaux, but ultimately sidelined farmers from decision-making in the process. Rudin notes

that the MMRA ended two centuries of local autonomy, highlighting the declining role of community-based Marsh Bodies which had previously managed the lands.

In part two, we see how the mid-century “development of a professional community” (84) of experts in agricultural engineering and economics played out in the Maritimes. Instead of restoring older structures, the later years of the MMRA prioritized the construction of large new tidal dams, which drained vast areas of marsh and made the upstream dykes and aboteaux (and the local knowledge associated with them) irrelevant. This vision of “technological mastery” (117) over nature was consistent with the mainstream of postwar environmental engineering, which preferred forceful interventions and highlighted the “superiority of centralized expert control over dispersed control” (122).

Since the 1960s, and particularly since the 1980s, the influence of the international environmental movement has seen the public reappraisal of many postwar interventions. On this topic, Rudin focuses much of his final chapter on the damming of the Peticodiac River in Moncton by the MMRA and the decades long campaign to have the dam decommissioned. Residents living alongside the dam’s headpond, naturalized as Peticodiac Lake, enjoyed decades of recreational use of the waterway, as well as high valuations for their lakefront properties. This community was at odds with fisheries management and environmentalists, including Robert F. Kennedy’s international Riverkeeper movement and local Acadian groups, who sought to return the river to its pre-dam condition. Rudin reveals how contrasting ideas about “nature” were at the heart of this debate, and how definitions of “local” and “expert” knowledge were deployed by advocates on either side.

Rudin draws materials from national, provincial, and regional archives, but he largely builds his story from uncatalogued documents, bringing a wealth of primary material to public attention for the first time. The sources – minute books of local Marsh Bodies and the reports and correspondence of the MMRA – expose the routine bureaucracy that drove the reshaping of the landscape, detailing meeting after meeting. Rudin clearly illustrates the “MMRA’s need to micromanage” (104). He supplements these sources with his well-established practice of oral history interviewing, drawing on the personal and professional knowledge of a variety of people with connections to the landscapes touched by the MMRA. These interviews also form the basis for *Unnatural Landscapes*, a short documentary film that complements the book (<https://unnaturallandscapes.ca/>), exploring the legacy of the MMRA and what it means for a landscape to be “natural.”

Against the Tides makes an important contribution to our understanding of the unique marshland agriculture of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia along the Bay of Fundy. Notably, it updates this history, moving on from its well-studied Acadian roots to illuminate the ironically lesser-known, more-recent history of the region. An articulate and readable contribution to the literature on postwar environmental engineering by the Canadian state, the book highlights compelling local stories and perspectives, placing them into national and international context.

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Sara Spike is an instructor in the History Department and a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Marine Affairs Program at Dalhousie University.