

Review of Book: *The Seven States of California: a Natural and Human History* (by Philip L. Fradkin)

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This book is well written, interesting, and insightful. Biologists and lay readers both will find it worthwhile as a general interest book.

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THE SEVEN STATES OF CALIFORNIA: A NATURAL AND HUMAN HISTORY. *A John Macrae Book.*

By Philip L. Fradkin; photographs by the author. New York: Henry Holt and Company. \$30.00. xxi + 474 p; ill.; index. ISBN: 0-8050-1947-2. 1995.

Fradkin splits California into seven ecological regions and then shows how the characteristics of each region have shaped its human use. Ecological regions are diverse, ranging from lush redwood forests to bleak deserts. Human use is also diverse, ranging from the agriculturally dominated Central Valley to the urbanized South Coast region. The purpose of the book is to identify the influences of the ecological regions.

Fradkin selects a few "stories" to illustrate how the ecological characteristics of each region have affected the humans that have inhabited it. For example, survival in the desert region of California required adjustments by both aboriginal and modern inhabitants. Even in this century, the desert continues to affect its human inhabitants in more ways than is obvious: Whether serving as a secretive location to conduct sensitive military research, or as a hideaway for criminals on the run, the inhospitality and remoteness of the desert profoundly influences its human population.

Fradkin is an excellent storyteller. He selects interesting material and presents it smoothly and effectively. He is a professional writer and it shows. References are used throughout, but their use does not interfere with the easy flow of the text.

The book does not require any special knowledge of California, ecology, or human history, but readers familiar with the geography of California will find the book of most interest. However, all readers will learn much about the history of California.