Preface to the Paperback Edition

MUCH HAS HAPPENED in the decade since this book first made its way into the hands of readers. World events by which we measure change have come quickly. Indeed, rapid change has come to permeate our lives.

Among the hills and bottomlands of eastern Texas, changes in the landscape also have accelerated. There is a certain pattern in the kinds of alterations on the land—who owns the land has made a major difference.

We believe that managers of the National Forests, our biggest chunk of public land, have made a turnabout from long-term policy. Silviculture, the farming of the forests for wood output, no longer dominates decisions; management for diversity of plants and animals is wrestling for the wheel. Hardwoods have come of useful age in streamside stands left years ago for wildlife. Red-cockaded woodpeckers are coming back in places. Those who plan the future for the public lands look at 1930s maps and talk about what used to be; they speak hopefully of oaks and hickories coming in where pine beetles left holes in solid stands of loblolly.

But on private lands, economics calls the shots, even more than in the past. Following years of government-subsidized conversion of hardwood stands to pine plantations, some timber industries now show a sudden interest in managing for hardwoods, but only because the value of hardwood pulp for fine paper has escalated. Indeed, the increased value of hardwoods now allows owners more profitably to manage bottomland acreage, which is often too wet for pine but fine for oak and gum. Current plans of industry call for cutting hardwood stands every 40 years or less—before

the trees produce acorns or hollows sufficient to support much wildlife.

Timber corporations see, more than ever, that closer management is the price they pay to maximize their profits. Some hire wildlife biologists to manage hunting for the remnant game populations on their lands and to help them deal with public opposition to their timber management practices. Many now use herbicides instead of fire to kill the hardwood trees in stands reserved for pine—people grumble less if they can't see smoke. One company seeks legislation to prevent Japan from horning in on its hardwood-chips-for-paper industry. All employ methods to intensify their harvests—cutting trees on shorter cycles, using smaller parts of trees, enlarging monoculture stands.

The profit motive not only drives companies but more and more has come to dominate the lives of individuals. Where once our universities taught students responsibility to society, they now train them in the methods that will help them locate jobs. Jobs command a kind of worship, and in the workplace employees take as gospel truth the printouts from computers that have been programmed to forecast short-term profits.

Profit seeking tempts the small landowner to put pressure on the land. He or she wants to graze a cow or horse, build a rental property, or sell the trees to meet a payment on a car. Hard times amplify these pressures.

Each human generation is still larger than the last. Sons and daughters slice family holdings into parcels that grow smaller over time, and a night flight over rural private acreage shows a growing sea of homefront lights.

Grandaddy made his living from the land with relative impunity, but he had lots of land and simpler tastes. Five acres in our time cannot feed a growing family and have oak trees, deer, and quail to boot.

But the family living on acreage it owns has a better life than most. Being near the land benefits both people and the land. However, we see a growing tendency for most people to live separate from the land, and this bodes ill for both.

A major impact of this separateness arises from the economic motives of the absentee landlord. Many owners live in cities, acquiring pieces of the country as inheritance or for investment. They find it easy in this circumstance to scalp the land for money—they send someone else to cut the trees or build the condominiums, the check comes in the mail, and nothing changes on the map.

People, like the land, suffer when the two are disconnected. Fifty years ago, the variety that people need was met by trees and birds of different kinds and a hundred moods of weather. Now, dangerous city streets, posted land, and unfamiliarity with snakes and bugs keep us from places where natural diversity can still be found. We entertain ourselves indoors—at a dozen shopping malls, by an endless retinue of "products" built to sell, and with television shows that titillate with constant change.

As we harden our addiction to the constructed scenes that come at us with accelerating frequency, we lose interest in the slower-moving natural world. Our urge to know the different kinds of plants and animals, and even our ability to see that they are different, fades. Plants are green, animals are usually brown, and they are harder to spot in the woods than they are on the television screen.

For these reasons, East Texas land increasingly represents to people only income. It yields pleasure to the extent that it provides commodities that build and fuel the world we have built—wood fiber, beef, and residential lots. Managers produce commodities more efficiently in large-scale operations that focus on a single product. The result is increasingly evident: ever larger tree farms, hay pastures, and housing developments.

Wood and beef are increasingly the products of choice for East Texas lands. Once the owner or the manager settles on a product, plants and animals that interfere with its production become weeds. East Texans come from a long line of farmers, and they know what to do with weeds.

Nonetheless, despite the increasing tendency for land to be managed only for commodity production, we have been encouraged by the emergence of individuals who want to curb the im-

pact of the marketplace. Some hold jobs with land resource agencies, others work with industry, and some hold no professional affiliations. Many are young, but some are old. They hold in common a conviction that farming for material gain is not the only legitimate use of land. Under guidance from such people, management of public lands for more diverse ecosystems has assumed greater priority than it previously enjoyed.

Many of these women and men recognize the need to reconnect house-bound people with a more natural landscape. Some work to preserve or restore ecological diversity on public lands; some try to increase the public's access to land; some teach. Informal communications networks have arisen to connect these stewards for the land with one another.

Public attitudes are changing, partly from the efforts of these dedicated people. Taxpayers' objections to using tax money to purchase lands for public enjoyment are fewer than they might have been during the last generation. Old-timers build birdhouses and let odd corners of the back pasture grow up to trees and shrubs. The Federal Endangered Species Act, despite unwarranted abuses of its authority, holds strong against attempts to rescind it.

The information media tell us that few politicians, sports stars, or other public figures believe we are growing too fast and consuming too much. We do know that these notions are important to some people, and throughout history changes often started with convictions at the grass-roots level.

By their very nature, people always will be motivated to some degree to enhance and display their material well-being. Most people, including land managers, will find it tempting to use economic income as the final measure of success. Perhaps this can change—it has come as a surprise to us, for example, that writing this book was one of our most enjoyable, though least economically rewarding, ventures.

We thank the many readers who appreciated the first edition. Your letters and words helped more than you may know. If readers of this second printing find it to have been worth its cost in wood, we will have been amply rewarded.