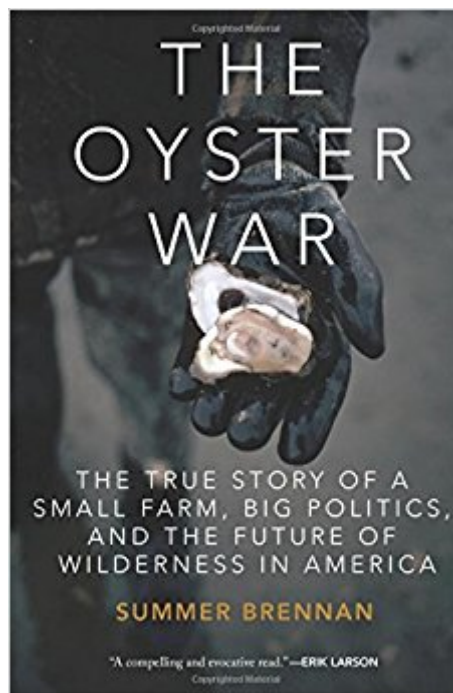




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# **The Oyster War: The True Story Of A Small Farm, Big Politics, And The Future Of Wilderness In America**



## Synopsis

It all began simply enough. In 1976 the Point Reyes Wilderness Act granted the highest protection in America to more than 33,000 acres of California forest, grassland and shoreline - including Drakes Estero, an estuary of stunning beauty. Inside was a small, family-run oyster farm first established in the 1930s. A local rancher bought the business in 2005, renaming it The Drakes Bay Oyster Company. When the National Park Service informed him that the 40-year lease would not be renewed past 2012, he vowed to keep the farm in business even if it meant taking his fight all the way to the Supreme Court. Environmentalists, national politicians, scientists, and the Department of the Interior all joined a protracted battle for the estuary that had the power to influence the future of wilderness for decades to come. Were the oyster farmers environmental criminals, or victims of government fraud? Fought against a backdrop of fear of government corruption and the looming specter of climate change, the battle struck a national nerve, pitting nature against agriculture and science against politics, as it sought to determine who belonged and who didn't belong, and what it means to be wild.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Every story is freighted with backstory, with multiple and intersecting histories. The great value of Brennan's book, even if it gets, as she writes, only 'as close to the truth as I could reasonably be expected to come,' is her deeply probing effort to understand and craft as full and complex an account as possible." - Los Angeles Review of Books

hands, it's also a pleasure to vicariously relive the oyster war. Brennan's narrative skills are marked by a relaxed pace, diligent reporting and a scrupulous but fun dive into backstory with ample historical and scientific pigmentation.... Brennan is a natural storyteller who makes a tough tale "that many locals and visitors winced through and tiptoed around" into a narrative celebration of the striking landscape of the Point Reyes Peninsula, and the spirit behind the oyster war itself." San Francisco Chronicle "In The Oyster War, Brennan writes with clarity and grace about an environmental conflict centered on an oyster farm in one of the most beautiful preserves in America, the Point Reyes National Seashore in Northern California, as the forces of history, culture, and politics converge to decide the farm's fate. Her saga raises the question: How far can one go to return a land to wilderness, when throughout its history it supported all manner of human endeavor? It's a compelling and evocative read for anyone who, like me, shares Brennan's belief that this territory is, in fact, a little bit magic." Erik Larson, New York Times bestselling author of Devil in the White City and Dead Wake "Brennan is a lyrical and lovely writer." Reason Magazine "An absorbing account of the clash between environmentalists and oyster farmers in the coastal towns north of San Francisco. . . [Brennan] confronts the ambiguities of the conflicting arguments and motives of the key players . . . Well-written and superbly reported." Kirkus Starred Review "Brennan ably documents and contextualizes decades of history" Publishers Weekly "In a lyrical narrative Brennan explores a legal case with potential implications for the future of wilderness legislation and administration for decades to come, presenting a complex matter with thorough and deliberate care." Publishers Weekly Spring 2015 Announcements "This book invites the reader to consider the oyster in an entirely new way. More than a delicacy best enjoyed with Champagne, the prized bivalve is metaphor for the intersection of environment and commerce. The Oyster War is a must read for anyone who cares about the poetry and politics of the plate. It's a local story that asks questions with national implications: when commerce and the environment meet, what does it mean to protect something wild?" Anne Zimmerman, author of An Extravagant Hunger: The Passionate Years of M.F.K. Fisher "Like the northern California fog she perfectly evokes, Brennan weaves her way around the tricky terrain of what wilderness means today. The Oyster War is a smart, page-turning account of what happens when a cultural landscape is imagined as something potentially pristine. Her superb research, local's vibe, balanced view, and ability to summon the magic that is Point Reyes, make The Oyster War vital reading for everyone interested in the future of U.S. environmentalism." Amanda Adams Hinde, author of A Mermaid's Tale and Ladies of the

Field" In these times of crucial need to protect both wild places and working landscapes supporting real people, difficult decisions must be made about who gets to stay and who must go. But we quickly find ourselves in a hall of mirrors. This is a devoutly honest book whose author recognizes that sometimes the closest we can get to truth is a matter of opinion. Her self-questioning integrity is a compass that can help us all steer a wiser course when we find ourselves in a tangle and the right direction is not easy to discern." &#151; Carl Safina, author of *Beyond Words; What Animals Think and Feel*

Summer Brennan was born to parents living in a houseboat on the San Francisco Bay. She has written for magazines and newspapers all over the country and works regularly with the United Nations Press Office in New York covering issues related to decolonization, disarmament, human rights and the environment. As an undergraduate at Bennington she studied with Mary Oliver. Later she took her masters from NYU in journalism and the Middle East. *The Oyster War* is her first book. Learn more at [theoysterwar.com](http://theoysterwar.com).

An important topic. The prose tends to jump around a bit, sometimes making me re-read a section to try to grasp what the transition between topics was.

A beautifully crafted book from a writer who profoundly respects both the community and land of which she writes. To learn about the history of oysters in West Marin and San Francisco was fascinating. Agriculture, land, water, wilderness, wild flowers, seals, and exotic deer are woven together in a landscape that is rife with political and personal agendas. The oyster as pawn in a war that like all wars, has no happy ending.

I enjoyed it mostly because we used to go to the Johnson Oyster Farm back in the '80s, but moved out of state in 1990. When we were at Point Reyes recently, we saw a sign referring to the attempt to return it to wilderness status. We were curious as to what happened, and a Google search lead me to this book. Wow, lots of politics involved.

Too much advocacy for the so-called wilderness advocates; too little of the sustainable food and scientific communities. She begins by espousing how fair she will be and in short order takes up a strident view against truth and reality. Too bad. It's a great story with more nuance that she was willing to consider. Further, to begin personal attacks against scientists was ... odd. Is the science

valid or isn't it? Did the state alter the conclusions of their own expert or didn't they? Is the water way better for having oysters or isn't it? Too few of those answers faced proper scrutiny.

For anyone who has spent time driving the back roads of Point Reyes, or who just enjoys wandering or national wildernesses, this book is a thoughtful contemplation on conservation, use, and misuse of the planet's natural spaces.

A terrific insight into some CA history and the politics behind decisions made by the National Park Service.

I followed the controversy surrounding Drake's Bay Oyster Company for several years, and I was always struck by the irony that such a bitter controversy could arise in such a beautiful part of the world. It must be that folks who live there are so passionate about their habitat and their heritage that they would fight fiercely (and not always fairly) to protect their environment and way of life. Summer Brennan's account of this controversy is deeply researched and fairly presented. I found myself captivated by the narrative and supporting detail. I was unable to put the book down and finished it in just over two days. West Marin County is a demanding muse. Any writer who wishes to do justice to the beauty and enchantment of that region had better bring his or her "A" game. Happily for us, Ms. Brennan was up to the task. Her descriptions of that area and of her own personal history there are alone worth the price of admission.

Great read! Well written.

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