

## SAVING NATURE UNDER SOCIALISM

When East Germany collapsed in 1989–1990, outside observers were shocked to learn the extent of environmental devastation that existed there. The communist dictatorship, however, had sought to confront environmental issues since at least the 1960s. Through an analysis of official and oppositional sources, *Saving Nature Under Socialism* complicates attitudes toward the environment in East Germany by tracing both domestic and transnational engagement with nature and pollution. The communist dictatorship limited opportunities for protest, so officials and activists looked abroad to countries such as Poland and West Germany for inspiration and support. Julia Ault outlines the evolution of environmental policy and protest in East Germany and shows how East Germans responded to local degradation as well as to an international moment of environmental reckoning in the 1970s and 1980s. The example of East Germany thus challenges and broadens our understanding of the “greening” of post-war Europe, and illuminates a history of central European connection across the Iron Curtain.

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# SAVING NATURE UNDER SOCIALISM

*Transnational Environmentalism in East Germany,  
1968–1990*

JULIA E. AULT

*University of Utah*



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*To my parents Bruce and Helene*

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## Abbreviations

- AGU – Working Group for Environmental Protection, *Arbeitsgruppe Umweltschutz* (Leipzig)  
 BBU – Federal Alliance of Citizens’ Initiatives, Environmental Protection, *Bundesverband Bürgerinitiativ Umweltschutz*  
 BEK – Alliance of Protestant Churches in the GDR, *Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR*  
 BUND – German Federation for the Environment and Nature Conservation, *Bund für Umwelt- und Naturschutz Deutschland*  
 BNU – League for Nature and the Environment, *Bund für Natur und Umwelt*  
 CDU – Christian Democratic Union  
 CUR – Christian Environmental Seminar Rötha, *Christliches Umweltseminar Rötha*  
 EC – European Community  
 FOE – Friends of the Earth  
 FRG – Federal Republic of Germany, *Bundesrepublik Deutschland*  
 GDR – German Democratic Republic, *Deutsche Demokratische Republik*  
 GNU – Society for Nature and the Environment, *Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt*  
 IUCN – International Union for Conservation of Nature  
 KFH – Ecclesiastical Research Center, *Kirchliches Forschungsheim* (Wittenberg)  
 LOP – Nature Conservation League, *Liga Ochrona Przyrody*  
 MUW – Ministry for Environmental Protection and Water Management, *Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft*  
 NKCh – Chemists’ Scientific Club, *Naukowe Koło Chemików*  
 NSMs – New Social Movements  
 NHF – Friends of Nature and Heimat, *Natur- und Heimatfreunde*  
 PKE – Polish Ecological Club, *Polski Klub Ekologiczny*  
 PZPR – Polish United Workers’ Party, *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*

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- RPEI – residual pollution exemption for investors  
SED – Socialist Unity Party, *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*  
SERO – secondary resource acquisition, *Sekundärrohstoffverfassung*  
SU – State Environmental Inspection, *Staatliche Umweltinspektion*  
URG – Environmental Framework Law, *Umweltrahmengesetz*  
WCC – World Council of Churches  
WiP – Freedom and Peace, *Wolność i Pokój*  
ZUG – Center for Environmental Development, *Zentrum für Umweltgestaltung*