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
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, Bund der 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
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
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 Kobi 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
List of Abbreviations

RPEI – residual pollution exemption for investors
SED – Socialist Unity Party, Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands
SERO – secondary resource acquisition, Sekundärrohstoffaufkommen
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