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.

**Julia E. Ault** is Assistant Professor in the Department of History, University of Utah.
NEW STUDIES IN EUROPEAN HISTORY

Edited by

PETER BALDWIN, University of California, Los Angeles
CHRISTOPHER CLARK, University of Cambridge
JAMES B. COLLINS, Georgetown University
MIA RODRÍGUEZ-SALGADO, London School of Economics and Political Science
LYNDAL ROPER, University of Oxford
TIMOTHY SNYDER, Yale University

The aim of this series in early modern and modern European history is to publish outstanding works of research, addressed to important themes across a wide geographical range, from southern and central Europe, to Scandinavia and Russia, from the time of the Renaissance to the present. As it develops the series will comprise focused works of wide contextual range and intellectual ambition.

A full list of titles published in the series can be found at: www.cambridge.org/newstudiesineuropeanhistory
SAVING NATURE UNDER SOCIALISM

Transnational Environmentalism in East Germany, 1968–1990

JULIA E. AULT

University of Utah
To my parents Bruce and Helene
Contents

List of Figures page viii
Acknowledgments ix
List of Abbreviations xii

Introduction 1

1 Balancing Economy and Ecology: Building toward Environmental Protection, 1945–1970 20

2 “Socialist Environmentalism”: Between Ideal and Practice, 1971–1982 54

3 Church, Faith, and Nature: An Alternative Environmentalism, 1972–1983 91

4 Intertwining Environmentalisms: Transboundary Pollution and Protest in Central Europe 129

5 Coming Out From Behind the Cloud: Environmentalism after Chernobyl 165

6 Growing Together? The Environment in the Collapse of Communism 197

Conclusion 228

Bibliography 239

Index 258
## Figures

2. View of the Welzow-Süd open-pit lignite mine in the Cottbus District (Brandenburg) in 1974.  
3. Church Congress of the Protestant Church of Saxony in Leipzig, 111.  
5. Greenpeace demonstration of environmental degradation near Bitterfeld-Wolfen.  
Acknowledgments

This book is many years in the making and owes an enormous debt of gratitude to the many institutions, mentors, colleagues, friends, and family who made it possible. The first inklings of this project were rooted in a semester abroad in Freiburg, Germany, and then became clearer while on a Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship after college. Placed in Jena, a smallish university town in the former East Germany, the relationships and experiences I had there opened my eyes to the many legacies – environmental and otherwise – of communist dictatorship.

At the University of North Carolina, the notions took clearer form in a dissertation under the guidance and encouragement of Konrad Jarausch. His ability to see the whole machine of the project, as well as each of the moving parts within it made the project, and ultimately, the book that much better. My thanks also to my dissertation committee members, Chris Browning, Chad Bryant, Susan Pennybacker, and Donald J. Raleigh for their input. Chad in particular has been a source of calm and steadfast reassurance during grad school and in the years since. In Chapel Hill, innumerable friends and fellow grad students made the time there intellectually stimulating and certainly more enjoyable. Derek Holmgren and Sarah Lowry plied me with excellent food on many occasions while Laura Brade, Adam Domby, Aaron Hale-Dorrell, Jennifer Kosmin, Caroline Nilsen, and Lars Stiglich all accommodated my desire to kick a soccer ball, go for a run, or chat over a beer. Also, thanks to fellow Germanists Friederike Brühofener, Tom Goldstein, Max Lazar, Steve Milder, Ned Richardson-Little, Michael Skalski, and Sarah Vierra for lending an ear and offering useful advice.

Numerous grants and fellowships enabled the completion of this project. FLAS grants from Indiana University, the University of Pittsburgh, and UNC provided me with the language skills to make my first forays east of the Oder, while Columbia’s Council for European Studies offered the means to conduct research in Germany and Poland. The Free University’s
Berlin Program supported a year of dissertation research, during which Karin Goihl’s knowledge, care, and concern were invaluable in navigating German archives and academic culture. While in Berlin, Paul Nolte’s and Martin Sabrow’s research colloquia as well as the Berlin-Brandenburg Environmental History Colloquium offered insights into the project’s potential. The Central European History Society also provided funds for additional dissertation research. Since coming to the University of Utah, I have received support at every level. A University Research Council grant along with College of Humanities International Travel Grants and Department of History funds all sponsored follow-up research and conference presentations in Germany.

The research behind this book would not have been possible without numerous archives and archivists. At the Archive of the Opposition, Petra Söllner kindly welcomed me every day. The Federal Archive in Berlin-Lichterfelde and the Federal Commission for the Records of the State Security Service (BStU) also provided a wealth of sources about the functioning of the GDR and SED. In particular, Julia Spohr at the BStU helped me to explore the many different ways the Stasi viewed the environment. At the Böll Foundation’s Green Memory Archive, Robert Camp and Christoph Becker-Schaum guided me in finding material about the Greens’ stance on the GDR and eastern Europe. Saskia Paul at the Archiv Bürgerbewegung Leipzig kindly aided my regional research. In the Lusatian hinterland, at Großhennersdorf’s Environmental Library, I had the opportunity to access rarely read files as well as to meet and talk with locals who had been active in the environmental movement. Andreas Schönfelder generously spent hours relating his experiences and connecting dots of the former opposition movement. Regional archives in Halle, Magdeburg, and Merseburg as well as the Evangelical Archives and the Political Archive of the German Foreign Office in Berlin provided invaluable sources for the book. The Ossolineum Library in Wrocław and the Open Society Archive were crucial in developing the Polish and eastern European aspects of this book.

I have been incredibly fortunate to have friends and colleagues who helped with the dissertation and then the transition to a book manuscript. In Berlin, Adam Blackler, Stefanie Eisenhuth, Monika Freier, Andrew Kloiber, Scott Krause, Allison and Andrea Schmidt, and Sean Wempe devoted countless hours listening to half-baked concepts and greatly improved them in the process. Scott Harrison and Laura Yacovone were critical to making Berlin – and a month-long stint in Leipzig – a positive and productive experience. Since then, Kathryn Julian and Alex Ruble...
Acknowledgments

have graciously gone down many a rabbit hole on East German history and read chapters as I revised them. A special thanks goes to Deb Barton, Jen Lynn, Willeke Sandler, Lauren Stokes, and Kira Thurman for providing essential feedback on the manuscript – and emotional support – throughout the book writing process. I also owe Astrid Eckert a debt of gratitude for her advice and mentorship. At the University of Utah, my fellow historians have offered a welcoming environment and stimulating hallway conversations over the last six years. I must especially thank Nadja Durbach, who has been an excellent mentor and crucially read the entire manuscript as it neared completion.

At Cambridge University Press, Liz Friend-Smith and the series editors for New Studies in Modern European History saw potential in this manuscript and expertly guided me through the revision process. Atifa Jiwa has also been incredibly helpful in innumerable ways. Liz and Atifa more than deserve to be thanked for their calm and professional handling of my many frantic emails. I would be remiss if I did not express my gratitude for CUP’s production team in making this book a reality. The two anonymous readers of this manuscript provided thoughtful and extensive feedback. This book has greatly benefited from their insights, and any shortcomings are my own.

Thank you to my gaggle of giggling Grinnellians and to my family, who have been there through every step of this endeavor. Amanda Lewis, Marta Grabowski, Anne Eaton, and Brenna Curley have cheered on their sole nonquantitative friend, offering wisdom, perspective, and of course, cheese. Andy, Kerri, and Oskar Ault have kept me grounded and made sure I maintained my Midwestern roots. I could not have completed this book without the unstinting love and support of my parents, Bruce and Helene. They have been all that is encouraging while making countless trips to Chapel Hill, Kraków, Berlin, and Salt Lake City. As I was finishing this book, Oliver entered the world and made it so much brighter. Finally, to my husband and partner in all things, Joshua Knudsen, life is unimaginable without you. Ich liebe dich.
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*


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 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*
List of Abbreviations

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