



In Oregon, the power of the people

Afifth generation Oregonian, Marcy Cottrell Houle has chronicled her work as a wildlife biologist in a handful of books including “The Prairie Keepers,” about raptor conservation efforts on Zumwalt Prairie in northeastern Oregon and “One City’s Wilderness” about Portland’s Forest Park.

While Houle has been at the forefront of some important conservation successes, she’s also experienced firsthand how economic interests and population growth sometimes come together to form an almost unstoppable pro-development juggernaut.

That is why she wrote her latest book.

“A Generous Nature” profiles 21 Oregon activists who have faced down that juggernaut at different times and in different situations in order to preserve Oregon’s wild and beautiful places.

Each chapter spotlights a person who had the foresight and the tenacity to stand up for wildlife, water purity, old growth forest or prairie at times when they were threatened.

Houle personally interviewed her subjects, and while each was immersed in a unique struggle, the totality of their efforts over time and around the state have accrued to create a strong environmental ethic overall. Oregon today can often serve as a beacon to others who seek to create parks, protect wilderness or enact legislation to preserve natural resources.

But, as the author points out, recent years have seen the defunding and dismantling of environmental protections across the nation. “A Generous Nature” should provide readers with inspiration and a challenge “to pick up the mantle and move the cause forward,” as one of Houle’s octogenarian interview subjects says.

While all of the profiled activists prevailed in accomplishing groundbreaking environmental campaigns, the author sometimes has trouble getting them to break out of their rather

This Week’s Book

“A Generous Nature” By Marcy Cottrell Houle

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dry procedural recitations and provide the livelier details of the story.

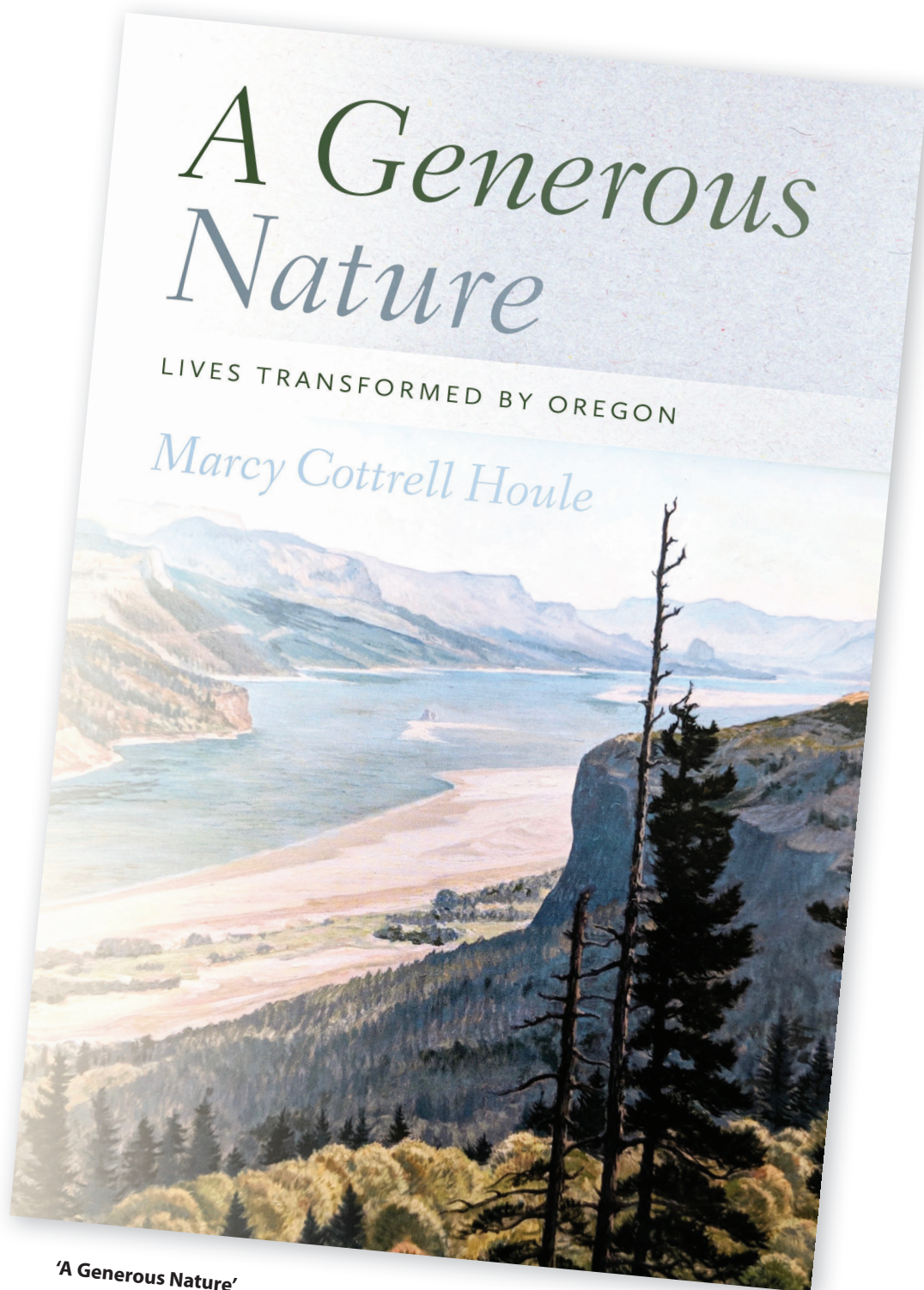
When she does succeed, however — as in her interview with environmental attorney Bill Hutchison — the reading is delightful. Hutchison recounts how he and Portland cardiologist Arch Diack opposed a plan for electricity generation that would have diverted water from a tributary of the Sandy River. While the scheme’s promoters contended that the impact would be minimal, Hutchison and Diack argued that the free-flowing Sandy, which already had a wild and scenic river designation, would inevitably be diminished if folks were allowed to mess with one of its important feeder streams.

Hutchison and Diack lost in the first couple of rounds, but when they took the matter to the Oregon Supreme Court, they juiced up their presentation with a little help from an unexpected source. You’ll have to read the book to discover the particulars, but suffice it to say, a little “artful” canniness was probably the decisive ingredient in their campaign.

From the ring of parks and trails surrounding the city of Portland to the public/private High Desert Partnership in Harney County, and at many places in between, citizen activism has helped Oregon make numerous environmental protection advancements.

“A Generous Nature” should remind us all of our power to make a difference.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlink.com



‘A Generous Nature’