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ZYGMUNT J. B. PLATER



The Snail Darter and the Dam

How Pork-Barrel Politics
Endangered a Little Fish
and Killed a River

“The inside story, laid out with wonderful lucidity, of a long and fascinating battle that became an icon of its era and remains instructive today. It’s a blueprint for community action and, sadly, a still-current roadmap of the way in which Washington works.”

• **Jonathan Harr**, author of *A CIVIL ACTION*

“Tennessee Valley Authority v. Hill is one of my favorite cases. This eminently readable account of the full history of the case is even more interesting than the story told in Warren Burger’s opinion for the Court (or in my memory of the oral argument and the shifting positions of the Justices in my book *FIVE CHIEFS*), especially the account of how President Carter rejected the ‘God Committee’s’ darter verdict.”

• **Hon. Justice John Paul Stevens**,
Supreme Court of the United States (ret’d.)

“*THE SNAIL DARTER & THE DAM* is an inspiring and informative American story of regular people fighting powerful special interests, about how the public interest lost out to big money and its political allies—and of failures by the local and national press to report the story fairly, accurately, and in proper context.”

• **Dan Rather**, Anchor & Managing Editor, AXS.TV,
former reporter and 24-year Anchor, CBS News

“The story of the snail darter and the TVA is the Thermopylae in the history of America’s conservation movement, and this book by Zygmunt Plater deserves to be the classic telling of it.”

• **E. O. Wilson**, University Research Professor Emeritus,
Museum of Comparative Zoology, Organismic &
Evolutionary Biology Dept., Harvard University

The Snail Darter & the Dam – How Pork-Barrel Politics Endangered a Little Fish and Killed a River

“ Environmental extremism !!! ”

...the citizens campaign was launched by “homosocialists” (says Rush Limbaugh) and “fringe lunatics” (Sean Hannity), “mis-using” endangered species law to halt the Tennessee Valley Authority’s final dam...



The snail darter story has become an iconic episode in modern American history, a classic case regularly voted one of the nation’s top three Supreme Court environmental decisions, but also enjoying dubious public notoriety as “The Most Extreme Environmental Case Ever,” where a TINY fish stopped a GIGANTIC hydro-electric project! Ecology vs. Economics ! Endangered Fish vs. People !

But it wasn’t a hydro-electric dam! The small TVA project had two main purposes: “Recreation,” and a hypothetical “Model Industrial City” condemning 300+ family farms to be given to the Boeing Corporation for re-sale! — a corrupt project from the start.

Only in America could this kind of fish story happen: the farmers, Cherokee Indians, trout fishermen, local conservationists, and the author and his students carry the snail darter’s endangered species crusade against TVA’s Tellico Dam through the Supreme Court, the first-ever “God Committee,” and all the political dysfunctions of modern government—jaded congressional tribalism, monolithic lobbying on Capitol Hill and in federal agencies, unthoughtful “infotainment” media and skewed public opinion.

Telling the story beyond the court case, the book describes how in the American system of governance a small group of citizens sorely lacking in financial and political support could work their way through the corridors of national power and the federal courts, struggling to bring to justice an economically irrational, environmentally destructive pork-barrel project.

It’s a parable that highlights the strengths, idiosyncrasies, perils, and needs of our vexed modern systems of democratic governance. Exactly contrary to its reputation as a symbol of irrational extremism, the little fish was an avatar of common sense, a political and economic “canary-in-the-coal-mine”—though pork-barrel politics and media ultimately overrode the fish’s truth.

The snail darter story has enough twists and turns to intrigue and annoy just about anyone.

Authored by Prof. Zygmunt Plater, Boston College — **COMING THIS SPRING FROM YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS** — yalepress.yale.edu/yupbooks/

[For information on the snail darter versus Tellico Dam: <http://www.bc.edu/snaildarter>]

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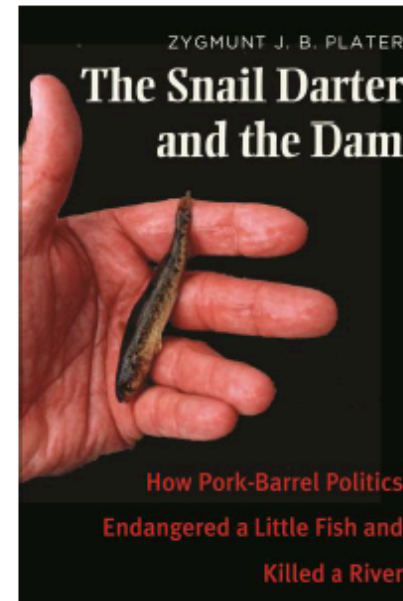
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Even today, thirty years after the legal battles to save the endangered snail darter, the little fish that blocked completion of a TVA dam is still invoked as an icon of leftist extremism and governmental foolishness. In this eye-opening book, the lawyer who with his students fought and won the Supreme Court case—known officially as *Tennessee Valley Authority v. Hill*—tells the hidden story behind one of the nation's most significant environmental law battles.

The realities of the darter's case, Plater asserts, have been consistently mischaracterized in politics and the media. This book offers a detailed account of the six-year crusade against a pork-barrel project that made no economic sense and was flawed from the start. In reality TVA's project was designed for recreation and real estate development. And at the heart of the little group fighting the project in the courts and Congress were family farmers trying to save their homes and farms, most of which were to be resold in a corporate land development scheme. Plater's gripping tale of citizens navigating the tangled corridors of national power stimulates important questions about our nation's governance, and at last sets the snail darter's record straight.



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