

**THE FRONT RANGE OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS:
AN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY, 1700-1900**

George H. Vrtis, M.A.

Dissertation Advisor: John R. McNeill, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the relationship between human society and the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains from 1700 to 1900. It explores and analyzes the various ways Native American and Euro-American peoples inhabited Front Range ecosystems and how their socioeconomic structures, land-use strategies, technological developments, numbers and energy regimes combined with environmental factors to shape the world around them. From the early eighteenth century through the end of the nineteenth century, this study demonstrates that humankind progressively extended its reach over Front Range ecosystems, eventually reengineering and reseeding them in an ever more comprehensive and deliberate manner. The changes led from seasonal exploitation by relatively small bands of hunting-and-gathering Indian societies to year-round occupancy by large numbers of industrially minded Euro-American settlers; and from a set of land use strategies that promoted biological diversity and ecological stability over vast areas of the Front Range to far more commercial and industrial resource strategies that led to a profound restructuring of existing ecosystem services (or primary processes), and the types of massive ecological disturbances and general environmental instability that tended to characterize much of later nineteenth-century America. By looking at environmental change through the lenses of both human culture and ecology, this study reveals the often

complex and dialectical ways that human societies and environmental factors contributed to the overall strands of change.