

Aqua Shock: The Water Crisis in America

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Dive right into the water wars, where water is the new oil, a limited resource that's critical to life on the planet. In *Aqua Shock*, award-winning journalist Marks illuminates the multifaceted challenges and perspectives on water, or "liquid gold." The complex problems that cloud this vital resource are gathering in a perfect storm, according to Marks' research.

Making the impending water crisis understandable to everyday citizens, Marks lays out the data explaining where water comes from, the global context, the complex, contradictory laws governing water, the dangers of contamination, cost and infrastructure issues, leaders and organizations (called "water gods"), and possible solutions to mitigate the crisis.

Water challenges vary by region: development and population growth in the arid West; drought in the Southeast; agricultural runoff in the Mississippi basin; naturally-occurring arsenic leaching into East coast water supplies; and aging water infrastructure everywhere. These water problems are exacerbated by climate change. Fresh water, once considered a renewable resource, is shown to be increasingly at risk.

Even now, most people don't see or can't understand the problems. After all, leaks from aging pipes are usually buried underground. In addition, "Water and laws that regulate it are complicated at best and confounding at worst." For example, in some states, it is illegal to capture rainwater or snowmelt from the gutters.

Scouting out diverse perspectives from regional experts, government statistics, court disputes, and conservation successes, Marks marshals a wealth of resources that show just how contentious and complex water issues remain, even when the particulars point to a looming crisis without prompt action.

Some localities are making headway in water stewardship. New Mexico created a fifty-year water plan, as did El Paso. A mention of Brisbane, Australia's water reduction success is tantalizing but brief. A list of tactics, such as how to reduce groundwater contamination, in the final chapter begins to address solutions. A more vigorous call to action might have strengthened the final chapter.

As a wake-up call, *Aqua Shock* is an admirable overview of the complex issues, long-standing water wars, and multiple perspectives on water. It also includes resources and notes for further exploration. It provides businesses, citizens, and policy makers who aren't water experts with an inside look at understanding the roots and scope of the im-pending water crisis.

BOBBYE MIDDENDORF (September / October 2009)

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