

Water Always Wins: Thriving in an Age of Drought and Deluge

Erica Gies

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Erica Gies's book documents how conventional water control efforts damage ecosystems and the water cycle, and how they are overwhelmed by natural disasters driven by climate change. Still, whether in Midwestern floodplains, Vietnam's mangrove swamps, or among Iraq's marsh dwellers: *Water Always Wins*.

Gies looks to ancient and Indigenous technologies that utilize water's natural ebbs and flows to mitigate the extremes of floods and droughts. She hunts down paleo gravel river beds that store water underground with a California hydrogeologist, tours China's sponge cities with their landscape architect, and visits Kenya's "water tower" mountains, which birth water supplies to valleys below.

There's a memorable discussion about restoring beaver populations in England and the Pacific Northwest that relates the creatures' impressive prowess at healing salmon runs and wetland ecologies. Also compelling is the book's focus on water insecurity in a coastal city in India: Gies notes that Tamil people traditionally used a network of linked communal ponds and tanks for their measured water collection and usage, but that, after colonization, the system crumbled, leading to a lower water table, seawater intrusion, and the limitation of local access to tap water to just a few hours a day.

Gies is passionate about protecting water rights for marginalized populations, and so her book examines legal, economic, and political strategies to that effect. It acknowledges that people must change the prevailing "culture of concrete" mindset used in "hyper-engineering" tools like megadams and higher seawalls, instead of nature-based water management systems. The book's portrayals of those involved in such innovative projects that work with, rather than against, water's slow, relentless power are vibrant.

Water Always Wins is an inspiring, insightful book about the myriad ways that "water detectives" are helping water to heal the planet.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (May / June 2022)

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