



Water: A Natural History

By Alice Outwater

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Water: A Natural History By Alice Outwater

An environmental engineer turned ecology writer relates the history of our waterways and her own growing understanding of why our waterways continue to be polluted—and what needs to be done to save this essential natural resource. *Water: A Natural History* takes us back to the diaries of the first Western explorers; it moves from the reservoir to the modern toilet, from the grasslands of the Midwest to the Everglades of Florida, through the guts of a wastewater treatment plant and out to the waterways again. It shows how human-engineered dams, canals and farms replace nature's beaver dams, prairie dog tunnels, and buffalo wallows. Step by step, Outwater makes clear what should have always been obvious: while engineering can depollute water, only ecologically interacting systems can create healthy waterways. Important reading for students of environmental studies, the heart of this history is a vision of our land and waterways as they once were, and a plan that can restore them to their former glory: a land of living streams, public lands with hundreds of millions of beaver-built wetlands, prairie dog towns that increase the amount of rainfall that percolates to the groundwater, and forests that feed their fallen trees to the sea.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

What happens when you flush your toilet? Environmental engineer and writer Alice Outwater knows, and she guides the reader through the technical ins and outs of such delicate matters as water treatment and sewage handling--subjects she writes about with considerable charm. Here you will learn how "raw sludge brew" is separated, how methane from sewage is converted to a source of power, and how aqueducts past and present really work. Outwater also describes in lay terms the complex ecology of rivers, making a strong case for the preservation of free-flowing streams in the place of dammed waterways. Her book is somewhat more narrowly focused than the title suggests, but it is highly interesting and instructive nonetheless.

From Publishers Weekly

A generation after the Clean Water Act was passed, one third of our waters are still polluted, according to the author, and only 6% of contamination is caused by industry. Environmental engineer Outwater, who managed scum and sludge removal in the Boston Harbor cleanup, reaches back into our history to chart the changes in our waters. Once, a tenth of the total land area was beaver-built wetland; the beaver's decline caused the first major shift in the nation's water cycle. The depressions buffalo made on the ground and the holes dug by prairie dogs collected rain and runoff that seeped down to the water table; our waterways have been transformed by the loss of these keystone species. Outwater looks at grasslands and forests, artificial waterways, agriculture, aqueducts and toilet bowls, sewers and sludge (she gives a guided tour of a waste-treatment plant). She makes a strong case for restoring natural systems to public lands?repopulating beaver, bison and prairie dogs. This book is a valuable addition to environmental literature and to our understanding of water.

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From School Library Journal

A plea for ecological conservation that focuses on "keystone species" such as beavers, prairie dogs, and mollusks, describing how "nature's engineers" must be allowed to revive our decimated waterways.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Pearl McLean:

Have you spare time to get a day? What do you do when you have more or little spare time? That's why, you can choose the suitable activity intended for spend your time. Any person spent all their spare time to take a wander, shopping, or went to the Mall. How about open or maybe read a book entitled Water: A Natural History? Maybe it is to become best activity for you. You know beside you can spend your time along with your favorite's book, you can cleverer than before. Do you agree with its opinion or you have various other opinion?

Leigh Brown:

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