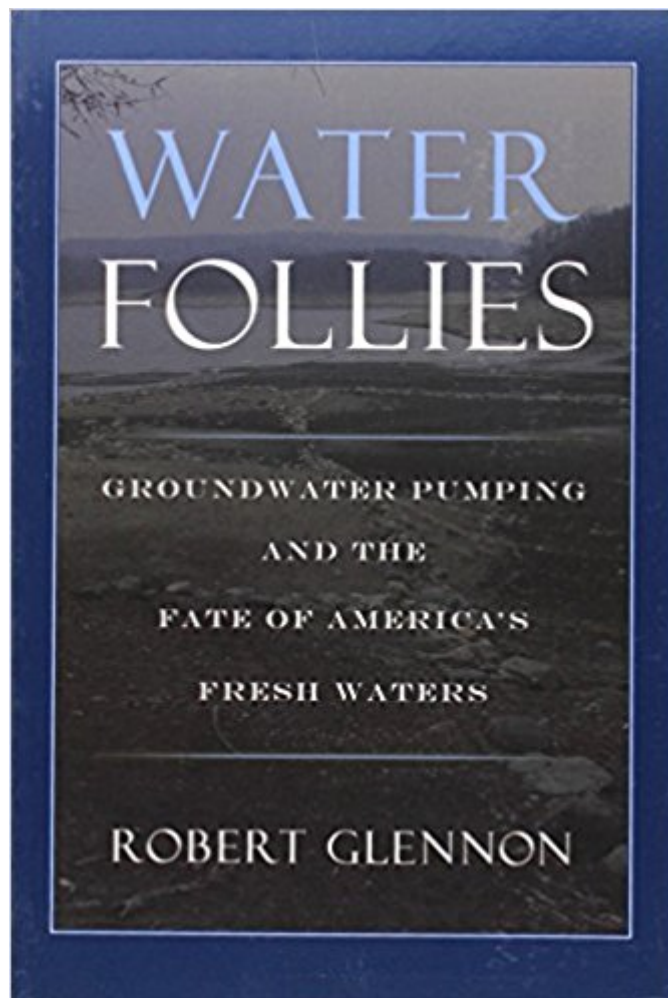




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# Water Follies: Groundwater Pumping And The Fate Of America's Fresh Waters



## Synopsis

"...a book as rich in detail as it is devastating in its argument." -SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN"Water Follies deserves a place alongside the late Marc Reisner's classic Cadillac Desert."  
-ENVIRONMENT"a lively account of hydrology" -NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS"if you want to scare yourself silly, read Water Follies, by Robert Glennon. In it you'll learn how America is irrigating itself to death-just like the Sumerians-while sucking its groundwater aquifers dry."-TORONTO GLOBE & MAIL

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In the high plains of Texas the farmers who grow cotton, alfalfa and other crops are entitled by law to as much underground water as they can reasonably use. No matter that this water comes from the Ogallala Aquifer, that vast underground reservoir whose levels have dropped precipitously since 1940. No matter that the overpumping threatens eventually to put thousands of farmers across seven states out of business. The illusion, codified in the law not just in Texas but in much of the U.S., is that groundwater is somehow boundless, or in a category apart from lakes, rivers and streams, and ought not be regulated, even for the common good. Now comes Robert Glennon to puncture this illusion, in a book as rich in detail as it is devastating in its argument. Its focus on groundwater brings overdue attention to a category that accounts for nearly a quarter of American freshwater use. Its title, *Water Follies*, sets the tone for tales that can be tragicomic; this is a book about water being squandered, so it is also, as the author puts it, a book about "human foibles,

including greed, stubbornness, and especially, the unlimited human capacity to ignore reality." Take, for example, his story of the fast-food french fry. It used to be that potatoes were grown on unirrigated land, he writes, but Americans' love of processed foods changed that. Uneven moisture leads to small, knobby, misshapen potatoes, so most American growers, even in places such as Minnesota, routinely irrigate their lands, to produce products acceptable to the industry and customers like McDonald's. But in Minnesota the groundwater that farmers pump for potatoes turned out to be the same water that helps to sustain the Straight River, a major trout fishery. Even modest pumping for potatoes, a federal study eventually concluded, had the potential to reduce the river's flow by one third during irrigation season, with adverse impact on the brown trout. For now, the trout are not in danger, but that could change if Minnesota were to approve applications from farmers still eager to see potato planting and irrigation widen. "One long-term answer, of course," Glennon notes, with characteristic wryness, "is for us, as American consumers, to accept french fries that have slightly different colors, or minor discolorations, or even ones that are not long enough to stick out from a super-size carton." Farmers are not the only ones who get a hard time for their shortsightedness. Bottled-water purveyors, particularly Perrier, are tarred for their pursuit, in places such as Wisconsin, of cool, underground (and highly profitable) springwater in quantities so vast as to prove devastating to the ecology of nearby rivers. The gold-mining industry is called to account for "dewatering" operations in, for example, Nevada, where it makes way for its deep operations by pumping away groundwater at a stunning rate. And planners in Tampa, Fla., and San Antonio, Tex., come under fire for their cavalier reliance on perishable underground sources such as Texas's Edwards Aquifer to fuel development they are finding difficult to sustain. The cumulative picture painted by the author is a grim one. Already four states-- Florida, Nebraska, Kansas and Mississippi-- use more groundwater than surface water, and more and more are looking underground to support growing populations. Becoming equally apparent are the consequences in dry rivers, land subsidence, and aquifers drawn down far faster than they can ever be recharged. "The country cannot sustain even the current levels of groundwater use," Glennon writes, "never mind the projected increases in groundwater consumption over the next two decades." Why is it that groundwater has become subject to such abuse? One reason, of course, is that buried below the surface, it is hidden from the kind of relentless monitoring that in recent decades has helped clean up rivers such as the Erie and the Hudson. But Glennon, a professor of law at the University of Arizona, finds buried in the law some further reasons for the neglect. Even now, he says, most American laws affecting groundwater do not recognize any connection between underground and surface waters, despite abundant evidence of such links. They remain rooted in 19th-century ideas

that underground flows were something so mysterious that they could not be understood, an assumption that has been translated into lax or nonexistent regulation. In most parts of the U.S., the author points out, surface water is subject to doctrines of riparian law or prior appropriation, with water rights carefully parceled out to various claimants. Groundwater, in contrast, is most often subject to the rule of capture, which, as Glennon observes, essentially means that "the biggest pump wins," notwithstanding the impact on surface water or the aquifer itself. To Glennon, the plight of the country's groundwater has come increasingly to represent what biologist Garrett Hardin called "the tragedy of the commons," a direct result of allowing citizens unlimited use of a common area. Among his recommendations for the future is an immediate halt to unregulated groundwater pumping. To some ears, especially those of high-plains Texas farmers, that is certain to sound like an unconscionable assault on property rights. But *Water Follies* makes the case that groundwater is something that we all should regard as very public indeed. Douglas Jehl, a reporter for the New York Times, writes frequently on water issues for that publication. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"*Water Follies* deserves a place alongside the late Marc Reisner's classic *Cadillac Desert*." (Environment)"a lively account of hydrology." (The New York Review of Books)"if you want to scare yourself silly, read *Water Follies*, by Robert Jerome Glennon. In it you'll learn how America is irrigating itself to deathâ "just like the Sumeriansâ "while sucking its groundwater aquifers dry." (The Globe and Mail)"Even if you are not working with water issues, you should read this book for a wider awareness of the depth and importance of groundwater impacts, right down to the bottle of water you are probably drinking right now." (Conservation in Practice)"To law professor Robert Glennon, the names Perrier and Poland pack a fearful punch, for they and the other huge producers of bottled water are feeding a craze that puts the environment on the brink of disaster." (Publishers Weekly)"...a book as rich in detail as it is devastating in its argument." (Scientific American)

The book *Water Follies* was a compelling read and like many other writings re. Unquenchable America's Water Crises and what to do about it by: Robert Glennon the answers in my opinion for a positive resolve have been made clear. Unfortunately, our precious water resource has and still is being looked at as a commodity more so than a precious resource at the state level as well as by water purveyors within the United States and until that rule of thinking has changed I fear one day what will be discharging out from my water spigot is going to be nothing more than paper rights. Unfortunately I will have nothing to wash it down with. Kudos to Mr. Robert

Glennon.

I like Mr. Glennon's book very much but I did think the writing style was just a little dry. I understand the theory behind "the Tragedy of Law and the Commons," but I think at some point in the future population growth will outstrip our ability to take care of our water needs regardless of laws or rights or where the water is located. I think most of the world is being fooled. Every one seems to be thinking oil and the price of gasoline at the pump. Water and not having it is the world's biggest problem. Some research I've read suggest that the population of the United States could grow as much as another 100 million by 2043. Where are we going to get all of the water for them? This book and others about water are an important subject for any family man concerned about his family and the future. Regards, Keith Renick, Peachtree City, Ga.

I gave this book to a friend who just completed an environmental science degree. She said she thought it should be required reading. She learned about some major water concerns in this book that she wasn't taught in classes she took on this same subject. If you are at all concerned about the future of our water supply, you must read this book. While most of us cannot fight the big battles that this issue requires, we can stop buying McDonald's french fries, farm-raised salmon, farm-raised blueberries, etc. Even if you aren't majoring in environmental sciences, read this book. It is an eye opener. We are all going to be affected by a water shortage in the near future. We need to be educated about this very severe problem. Those who control the water will control the world.

This is a good read, if you're interested in groundwater. When I initially picked up this book, I was annoyed by the editorial style, but I picked it up half a year later and enjoyed it. The book offers some interesting case studies with good information to back them up and some discussion of water law. It seems well-researched and it is quite comprehensive and easy to read. I have to say, I was appalled that Glennon supports the bottled water industry, and only speaks negatively of pumping near springs and surface water. This is a negligible portion of the book, though. There's a decent glossary and appendix with contacts.

I thought I had a pretty good understanding of issues relating to fresh water and the environment. I didn't, but I do now after reading *Water Follies*. This is a very important book for anyone interested in the environment. I am pretty well read on environmental topics and was surprised by how much I learned from Glennon's very readable book. The author explains very clearly the interrelationships

among ground water, lakes, rivers, and the damage we have done and are doing to the environment through mindless groundwater pumping. Fresh water shortages and ground water pumping are going to be front page stories over the next few years. Water Follies will enable you to appreciate the issues involved and to develop a well informed opinion.

It's interesting, but over-shadowed greatly by Cadillac Desert, if you've read that one first.

We can't comprehend how much water we use as individuals and a nation every day. It's accepted that this resource is always there. In this book Robert Glennon spells out what is happening to are limited water supply and what we all should be doing about it. Remeber, you can't go more than about 3 days without taking in some water; we can't live without it.

Came early and is just as described.

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