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Man and Water, The Social Sciences in Management of Water Resources, edited by L. Douglas James

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Man and Water, The Social Sciences in Management of Water Resources

Edited by

L. DOUGLAS JAMES¹

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We have all been to conferences for which a general topic is specified, and then there are particular sessions, each of which is entitled "The Contribution of _____," with the blanks filled in with the name of every conceivable pertinent discipline. Usually one goes to only one or two of these and then learns his lesson. Such a set-up is an almost sure sign that the conference will be bloody awful. It is a cop out on the part of the program planner.

Man and Water has this format, so I must confess that I approached it with a considerable negative bias. I should have known better. All of the contributors are excellent in their fields and the editor, whom I first knew as a student in a class of mine at Stanford in 1963, has a thoughtful and disciplined intellect. *Man and Water* is an excellent book which was carefully planned and edited.

Five social scientists representing the fields of anthropology, economics, geography, political science, and sociology review the contributions their disciplines have made to water resource management and suggest possibilities for further contributions in the future. The reviews are realistic and show that the social sciences, with the possible exceptions of economics and geography, have a lot to be modest about with respect to their contributions in this field. Economics has benefited from an early start and a methodology which is somewhat rigorous and meshes rather readily with engineering approaches. Geography benefits from its eclecticism and problem, rather than discipline, orientation. As Frank Trelease puts it in the book: "Geographers seem to be economists, sociologists, and anthropologists wearing false mustaches." The anthropology essay is especially notable, both for its careful and extensive view of anthropological research and its readability. Unfortunately, the large historical insights of the field are difficult to translate into decisive rules. The sociology essay is short and modest as befits the state of that field's contributions.

The book is unusual, if not unique, in that it contains its own set of reviews. These are by practical water specialists such as engineers,

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public officials, and lawyers. For the most part the reviews are carefully done and greatly help to put the contributions of the social sciences into the perspective of actual decisionmaking processes.

In sum, this is an excellent book and I commend it to your attention.

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