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Where the Water Goes: Life and Death Along the River

Arrienne DePauli

University of New Mexico - School of Law

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BOOK REVIEW

Where the Water Goes: Life and Death Along the Colorado River by David Owen (Riverhead Books, 288 Pages; 2017).

David Owen's discussion of legal issues, history, and different regional uses of the Colorado River in *Where the Water Goes: Life and Death Along the Colorado River* make the book a strong starting point for any reader to become better acquainted with the intricate manipulation of the Colorado River. Each chapter gives readers an idea of how the water is used, and though some chapters end before they touch on all water uses and benefits, this book is a valuable piece to consult for anyone who wishes to better understand what really happens to Colorado River water.

Where the Water Goes: Life and Death Along the Colorado River may not bring new information to those engulfed in science and policy fields of the west, but it provides a relevant basis, confined in a single book, for understanding issues regarding water of the Colorado River. Owen utilizes journalistic and story-telling techniques to inform readers on how the issues surrounding the Colorado River began and how they are playing out today. The book is organized to mirror Owen's exploration of the Colorado River, with each chapter dedicated to a different region along the river. Owen describes the history of water use where pertinent and also gives insight from current regional stakeholders, which benefits readers by providing an understanding of the complexities of water use. Owen cites key players in Colorado River water use planning, pertinent information from sources like *Cadillac Desert* and *Water Follies*, and conversations with researchers, farmers, and other individuals living on Colorado River water. His collection of various insights expose readers to different people and entities that will likely be affected by water shortages. At the end of the book, Owen wrote a chapter on "what is to be done." He does not offer conclusions or a definite proposal, but instead effectively relays to the reader that there are ideas out there, each with its own draw back. The reader is left to contemplate how impressive and intricate changes would have to be in order to overcome the "law of the river."

Owen accomplishes making Colorado River legal issues understandable to a broad range of readers. Owen titled a chapter "The Law of The River" and also built upon the subject in other chapters throughout the book. In the chapter, he shows the reader how and why legal issues have been festering since the original use of prior appropriation in the late 1800's, and continued due to the inaccuracies of the Colorado River Compact of 1912. He uses Colorado water law as an example to better explain the prior appropriation theory of water law and its control on site specific water use. The explanations skim the surface of prior appropriation and Colorado River Compact issues, but this suffices to show "where the water goes" and does not overburden the reader with intricate legal theory. If the reader needs more legal insight, Owen named a Colorado water law book he prefers for the reader to consult. Additionally, Owen focuses on how different entities legally manage Colorado River water. In a later chapter, Owen mentions California's "primitive approach" to ground water compared to that of Colorado's more "sophisticated"

handling. DAVID OWEN, *WHERE THE WATER GOES: LIFE AND DEATH ALONG THE COLORADO RIVER*, 154 (2017). He discusses the Supreme Court's interpretation of Indian water rights promised in the Colorado River Compact in a different chapter as well. It may have benefited the reader for all law related discussions to be confined in a single chapter. A cohesive organization would have helped the reader to understand the breadth of law involved all at once, instead of having to connect and compare laws of different regions as they read through the book. Adding information on other relevant laws and how they have been interpreted over time, as well as how different entities, with their own water law and policies, regulate their allotment of Colorado River water, could potentially have benefited an even broader audience as well.

Owen amply uses descriptions to assist the reader in visualizing the past and present effects of human involvement in controlling and using Colorado River water. For example, a chapter titled "Lees Ferry" is filled with small stories of histories of many individuals that lived in the region. There were small errors in the history portion of the hardcover version of the book that were noticed by the author and other individuals, but not enough to change the book's overall value to readers. Owen has corrected the problems in the paperback version of the book and noted them on his blog. See David Owen, *Where the Water Goes*, https://www.davidowen.net/david_owen/where-the-water-goes.html (last visited Oct. 14, 2019). The description of Hoover Dam construction is also useful to readers because it paints a picture of the terrific and amazing nature of manipulation of the river. Owen does not shy away from explaining concepts related to environmental sciences and is able to give readers a basic understanding of environmental issues surrounding the different geographical areas that use Colorado River water. Though the scientific descriptions were not technically in-depth, they adequately describe "where the water goes" in terms understandable to a broad group of individuals.

The stories, descriptions, and explanations included in the book support its overall purpose of describing where the water of the Colorado River actually goes. Yet, some chapters stopped before explaining the full extent of "where the water goes." This is evident when comparing the chapter on Las Vegas to that of the Central Arizona Project (CAP). The Las Vegas hydrology and water solutions are thoroughly explained, while the CAP chapter focuses mainly on history and policy. The CAP takes Colorado River water from Phoenix to Tucson, and though Owen mentions initial qualms involving the project and even President Carter's attempt to stop it, the chapter does not completely follow the water. See *Id.* at 143-145. Adding a discussion of the agreement between Phoenix and Tucson involving CAP water sharing in times of shortages would have been beneficial for readers because it shows that priorities can evolve, and entities can come together for change. Owen does describe the tension regarding the Arizona and Colorado River water, but here he missed an opportunity to complete the water's journey in the region.

This book's overall value is not impaired by choices in organization or by some chapters stopping a little short of following the water to its farthest uses. The book is meant to provide a summary of how the issues of the Colorado River developed over time, and it is not meant to act as an encyclopedia on the subject. The concise nature of the book and its information make it a manageable starting point for those not already exposed to the complications of Colorado River water use. For

those who are already acquainted with the Colorado River and its issues, this book may provide insight to possible misconceptions and shed light on unknown underlying issues. The value of this book is that it provides insight and makes the reader contemplate “where the water goes.”

Arianne DePauli
Class of 2021
UNM School of Law

