

Review: The World's Water 1998-1999. The Biennial Report on Freshwater Resources.

By Peter H. Gleick.

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Gleick, Peter H. *The World's Water 1998-1999. The Biennial Report on Freshwater Resources*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1998. 307pp. Paper. ISBN: 1-55963-592-4. Recycled, acid-free paper.

Fresh water is essential. In *Water* (Stodard Pub., 1999), Marq de Villier's noted "if all the world's water were stored in a five-litre container, available fresh water would not quite fill a teaspoon" (31). It is that fraction that is the focus of Peter H. Gleick's biennial report, the first in a comprehensive and timely series on this vital element. Initiating a process of monitoring and education Gleick's book spearheads change in water management, towards "an ethic of sustainability" and equity (33). Gleick is well known as a visionary thinker in the area of water use and he believes many current policies and practices are flawed.

Gleick summarizes crucial issues such as the decommissioning of large dams (and the dangers of private-sector funding of existing projects), the paucity of response to global water needs (and subsequent loss of life and productivity), climate change, international conflict and water supplies and new legislation and policy. Each area is addressed in self-contained chapters, and a Water Briefs section updates recent research, institutions (such as The World Commission on Dams, The World Water Council and others), policy debates and (particularly relevant for this journal), an extensive list of water-focused electronic sites.

Loren Eisely posed a question we might consider today: "As for men, those myriad little detached ponds with their own swimming corpuscular life, what were they but a way that water has of going about beyond the reach of rivers?" Gleick's volume provides ample evidence of the need for extended vigilance and action. One of the book's strengths is its amalgamation of much recent yet scattered information. He provides this information in a format with widespread relevance and appeal.

This book should be required reading for planners, ecologists, financiers, lawyers, political science and engineering students and is also relevant for senior high school classes. It is well written and carefully organized, with case studies, references, tables and appendices illuminating the material. Gleick closes with a possible vision of water use and policy in 2050. Our choice and

vision can determine what that future might be, "but we must make that [positive] choice soon" (184). Gleick's vision of a world (where ecosystem damage, disease, conflicts and inequalities are addressed with the urgency and commitment they demand) offers one of the finest blueprints for how future generations might live with water. The ongoing project and its goals are updated at <www.worldwater.org>. This is a realistic and impassioned book; I highly recommend it.

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