

Review: River Futures: An Integrative Scientific Approach to River Repair

Gary J. Brierley and Kirstie A. Fryirs (Eds.)

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Brierley, Gary J. and Fryirs, Kirstie A. (Eds.). *River Futures: An Integrative Scientific Approach to River Repair*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2008. 304 pp. ISBN 1597261130. US\$40.00, paper. Recycled, acid-free paper.

This book is based very much in Australian thinking and experience. It is therefore obviously assumed throughout this book that river repair is virtually a synonym for river management. The cadastral maps which provided the basis of land settlement allocation in early Australia were drawn up with rivers commonly used as boundaries. In my early professional experience as a community worker I found that these boundary lines were indeed a regrettable artefact which obscured the valuable concept of thinking in terms of watershed management. Moreover, they often resulted in conflict between neighbors over issues of land use and management. Even today, many rural people and even state or local governments still see rivers as a zone of contest rather than an opportunity for mutual improvement through joint action. So this book is of special importance in Australia and will probably be of considerable value in other former colonial nations, including those of North America. But the problems faced in these countries are different to those in others where effective river management evolved many thousands of years ago and escaped the massive reconstruction (or destruction) of colonialism.

That reflection aside, this book provides a very practical text based in the continuing search for better scientific understandings and a sound conceptual base. The editors provide in their first page a list of key visionary ideas which can be paraphrased as “respect for the inherent diversity, complexity and variability of river systems, framing crossdisciplinary approaches to river science and management upon a catchment scale landscape template.” While setting out to “facilitate the uptake of scientific insight,” the authors and editors give absolute commitment to their conviction that “ultimately, ecological rehabilitation is about people and process” (pp.xiii-xiv).

I am delighted at how well they have lived up to the goals defined by these visions. The book has well-presented maps and checklists and tabulations which provide valuable tools for learning. One feature which may well appeal to many readers is the extensive use of clear and well presented diagrams as a key element of explanatory text. They are a great improvement upon the usual plethora of decorative photographs. But the attention to social dimensions of rivers underlies the total book.

It is difficult to summarise the content of a book as comprehensive as this one. But the logical sequence of the book will perhaps convey its overall character. It opens with a discussion of vision and direction in river management, then to the context and process of developing an integrative river science. This is perhaps the most satisfying section of the whole book. The next series of chapters attempt to provide a comparative analysis of international experience, and as interesting as these are, one can only sympathise with the authors in their task of endeavoring to compress very complex stories into a single chapter. One can fully appreciate this dilemma by comparing the account from the United States with the volume of case studies by Doyle and Drew (2008) which I have also reviewed for this journal (see volume 28, issue 1: [Review: Large-Scale Ecosystem Restoration: Five Case Studies from the United States](#)). Finally, there is a review of process management and a futures summary.

Not being a river specialist, I find this single book provides me with a valuable and comprehensive background reference, a useful field guide to consult while in the field and a stimulus towards improving my own knowledge and practice. I trust many other readers will agree, and so where relevant will recommend it to their students.

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