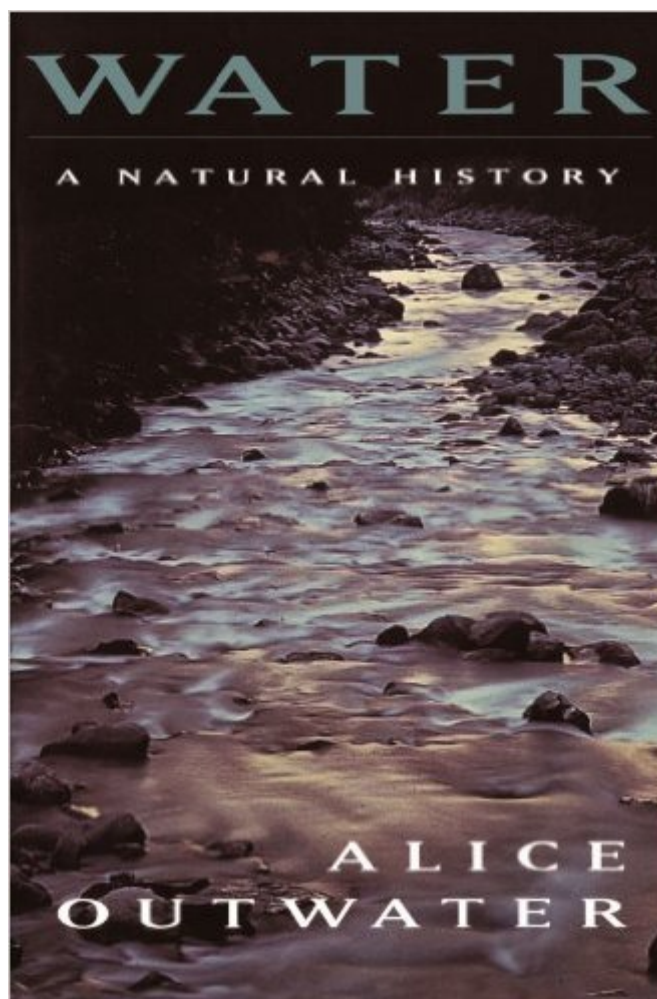


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# Water: A Natural History



## Synopsis

An environmental engineer turned ecology writer relates the history of our waterways and her own growing understanding of why our waterways continue to be polluted; and what needs to be done to save this essential natural resource. *Water: A Natural History* takes us back to the diaries of the first Western explorers; it moves from the reservoir to the modern toilet, from the grasslands of the Midwest to the Everglades of Florida, through the guts of a wastewater treatment plant and out to the waterways again. It shows how human-engineered dams, canals and farms replaces nature's beaver dams, prairie dog tunnels, and buffalo wallows. Step by step, *Outwater* makes clear what should have always been obvious: while engineering can depollute water, only ecologically interacting systems can create healthy waterways. Important reading for students of environmental studies, the heart of this history is a vision of our land and waterways as they once were, and a plan that can restore them to their former glory: a land of living streams, public lands with hundreds of millions of beaver-built wetlands, prairie dog towns that increase the amount of rainfall that percolates to the groundwater, and forests that feed their fallen trees to the sea.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a superlative book; I recommend anyone living in the USA to read it. It is short, but each sentence is informative, there are no wasted words, no fat. It is scientifically and historically accurate to the smallest detail, but never dry. *Outwater's* writing style is flowing and musical, and each sentence takes you further and deeper into an Alice-in-Wonderland journey of the magic and marvel

of each of the ecosystems she describes. She uses water as the vehicle for each journey, from molecules to the ocean. She describes the balances of Nature and how humans have fit in, or destroyed, these balances. I am a longtime outdoorsman, photographer, and conservationist, and had thought I was reasonably observant. But reading this book was like having a film removed from my eyes and being fitted with ultra-acute vision and heightened understanding and appreciation of our history and environment.

This wonderful book is not about the molecule or its chemistry. It is the natural history of life's most basic building material as it has been used and abused on the North American continent over the past five hundred years or so. It would be reasonable to call this engaging book a short history of the ecology of America's water only, as vital as it is, water is not alive. The author traces the interactions of living systems with the natural water cycle to support the thesis that nature had water quality and quantity problems well sorted out before we humans came on the scene. She indicates that restoration of natural systems of porous grasslands, free-flowing streams, fresh-water mussels, beaver ponds, and mature woodlands may very well be the "best practise" for water quality management if this country is serious about making every river, lake and stream fishable and swimmable. As I read this well crafted history it occurred to me that this book belongs in the same league as "A Sand County Almanac". I am sure Aldo Leopold would agree.

Many of the books on the increasingly common water shortages spend a great deal of their time listing mind numbing statistics. This author is authoritative but has the sense to pick a few key reasons why our entire US water infrastructure needs the help of nature. Beavers and prairie dogs may be what we need, at least in this country, to improve the percolating powers of the earth to clean what science alone cannot remove from our water. This is one of the few books in this area that is readable by anyone over mid-teens. I highly recommend this book for a history of why the Clean Water Act is not enough.

Yes, a book about water that makes sense. She begins with the beaver and the demand for its pelt in Europe and threads her way west through the exploitation of North America and on ... and brings us back to end her story in my local sewer plant. I very much enjoyed her subject and her style of writing. She makes her point clearly. She knows how water flows. I finished her book with a greater respect for water, for its sacredness and the inter-connectedness of all things. How "western civilization" believes it has the "right" to make the world in its image at any cost. Water: A Natural

History affirms my belief that American has yet to realize the devastating affects its taming of the west will cost. Now I have another standard to use when considering my choice of actions with water use and my relationships with the world I live in together with you.

I think one of the best features of this book is the excellent job that Alice Outwater does when she describes the courses water takes underground, and the way living animals and plants help refill the water table. Technical terms she uses are easily understood through context, and the concrete examples she gives concerning specific areas in the United States, exemplify processes which can take place in other countries as well.

This book opens one's eyes about water, the way the water cycle was before the continent was despoiled, little things like water percolating through leaves and big things like the beaver dams constructed by 200 million beavers...now, there are 200 million people! We are ordering extra copies to give away, to inform and to intrigue people in all walks of life.

If you have read the other reviews and this subject matter interests you, then by all means get this book. I thoroughly enjoyed it! Among many other interesting things Outwater writes about, I was surprised at the effect buffalos can have on groundwater, and my admiration for prairie dogs has increased even more. This book is a wonderful reminder of how man can act so foolishly without a clue to the consequences and also inspiring in its descriptions of the remedies man tries to correct these mistakes. My favorite chapter is "The Voyage of Rainfall."

This is a fascinating book. I was a biology/ecology major and am now retired, and I was amazed how much I learned from this book. I had no idea about the impact the beavers (and prairie dogs) had on our overall eco-system, and how much the landscape and water tables have changed since our expansion into the west and the decimation of the beavers, and the prairie dogs when the buffalo went.....

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