

From *The Ripple Effect* by Alex Prud'homme
<http://www.alexprudhomme.com/>

Precis: THE RIPPLE EFFECT

Fresh water will be the defining resource of the 21st Century. Experts call it "the next oil," and predict water will be the focus of increased tension and great innovation in coming decades. In response, I set out in 2007 to discover how people across the U.S. and around the world are using and abusing water today – and how they are preparing for what the UN has deemed "the looming water crisis."

The result is THE RIPPLE EFFECT. The book's title comes from my observation that every time we use water – even for something as mundane as washing our hands, spraying the lawn, or generating power for light – it sets off deep and wide hydrologic ripple effects, with consequences that most of us are unaware of. But today we no longer have the luxury of ignorance: we must understand how our actions impact the earth's limited supply of fresh water, and learn to value H₂O more highly. After all, we can live without oil, but not without water.

I think of this book as an intellectual adventure story. In the course of reporting, I traveled from inside New York City's new Water Tunnel No. 3 (the \$6 billion water tunnel being drilled 600 feet beneath Manhattan) to the disputed aquifers of Poland Springs, ME, the "intersex" fish and Dead Zone of the Chesapeake Bay, poisoned wells and flooding rivers in the Midwest, the "water-energy nexus" in oil and gas fields, the failed levees of Katrina-wracked New Orleans, drought-threatened Las Vegas, California's vulnerable San Francisco Delta, and up to the resource wars of the Alaskan Peninsula.

Each of these stories features compelling characters who grapple with crucial water issues, and is written in a narrative style for a broad audience. Water is a vast subject, and while **THE RIPPLE EFFECT** is inclusive it is not encyclopedic. The book is divided into four parts: water quality (what's in our water?); drought; flood; and water in the twenty-first century.

Some of the themes I address include: new types of water pollution, and their mitigation; the cost of failing infrastructure such as dams and levees; debates over bottled water and water privatization; climate change, population growth, and changing diets; sewage treatment; water law and the prospect of water wars; weather modification and

desalination; and so on. Although I did not report abroad each story is a local drama with global implications: I compare US water pollution to that of China; drought here to that in Australia; US floods to those in Europe; mining and energy use here to that of Central America and other parts of the world, and the like.

Water is a timely issue. The U.S. is using water in unsustainable ways, but now – some forty years after the burning of the Cuyahoga River and the poisoning of Love Canal, the founding of the EPA, and the passage of the Clean Water Act -- there is a slowly growing public awareness of the value of water, a booming market for water efficiency and treatment technologies, and a vibrant dialogue about potential solutions to the water problems of the coming decades.