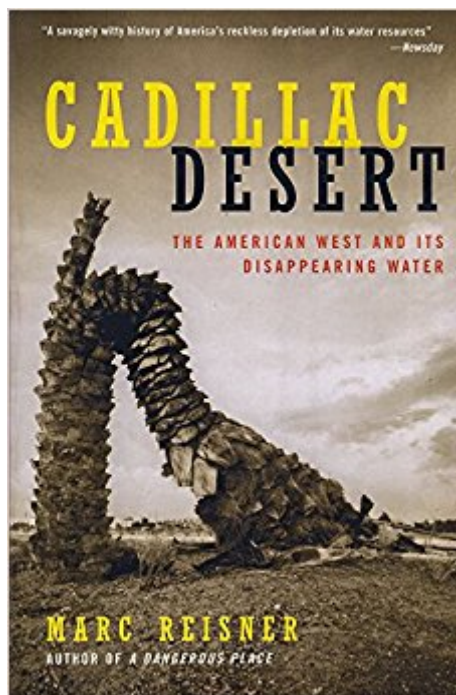




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# Cadillac Desert: The American West And Its Disappearing Water, Revised Edition



## Synopsis

"The definitive work on the West's water crisis." --Newsweek  
The story of the American West is the story of a relentless quest for a precious resource: water. It is a tale of rivers diverted and dammed, of political corruption and intrigue, of billion-dollar battles over water rights, of ecological and economic disaster. In his landmark book,  *Cadillac Desert*, Marc Reisner writes of the earliest settlers, lured by the promise of paradise, and of the ruthless tactics employed by Los Angeles politicians and business interests to ensure the city's growth. He documents the bitter rivalry between two government giants, the Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in the competition to transform the West. Based on more than a decade of research, *Cadillac Desert* is a stunning expose and a dramatic, intriguing history of the creation of an Eden--an Eden that may only be a mirage.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The definitive history of water resources in the American West, and a very illuminating lesson in the political economy of limited resources anywhere. Highly recommended!

"Masterful. . . Among the most influential environmental books published by an American since *Silent Spring*."--San Francisco Examiner  
"Essential background reading for anyone who cares about the drought ravaging the West and the region's prospects for changing course before it is too late."--Mark Hertsgaard, *The Daily Beast*  
"Timely and of national interest. . . . Resiner captures

Western water history in Cinemascope and Technicolor. . . . lawmakers, taxpayers, hurry up and read this book."--The Washington Post "The scale of this book is as staggering as that of Hoover Dam. Beautifully written and meticulously researched, it spans our century-long effort to moisten the arid West. . . . Anyone thinking of moving west of the hundredth meridian should read this book before they call their real estate agent."--St. Louis Post-Dispatch "A revealing, absorbing, often amusing and alarming report on where billions of [taxpayers'] dollars have gone--and where a lot more are going . . . [Reisner] has put the story together in trenchant form."--The New York Times Book Review

This 1986 tour de force examines water and dams in the mostly arid Western US. Topics addressed in detail include, but are not limited to, the Army Corp of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, California Aqueduct, California Water Wars, Central Arizona Project, Colorado River, Grand Coulee Dam, Glen Canyon Dam, Hoover Dam, John Wesley Powell, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, Mono Lake, Ogallala Aquifer, Owens Valley, Teton Dam, and William Mulholland. Underlying the encyclopedic scope of *Cadillac Desert* are two basic themes. First, the settlers lured to the arid West by the railroads and the US Federal Government in the 19th century needed cheap water to support agriculture on their 160 acre parcels of land, and also for their growing cities such as Los Angeles. Cheap hydroelectric power was often a secondary need, essential to pumping water. This need was met by projects of the Bureau of Reclamation and the Corps of Engineers. The projects were generally promoted by local congressmen, who supported each other's projects. In the long term this endeavor has been subsidized by US taxpayers since return revenues from the projects have generally fallen far short of plan. Second, the projects and dams have been an escalating source of controversy. For the most part the projects have not been economically justifiable, especially the irrigation projects, and especially the more recent projects. Also, the dams have created lasting problems -- salination of irrigated soil; silt accumulation behind the dams; environmental devastation to streams, salmon fisheries, and migratory birds; an overstretched US Federal budget, etc. Cheap hydroelectric power has also enabled groundwater pumping which is depleting aquifers. The taxpayer subsidized benefits of cheap water have often gone to large corporate agriculture, not the small farmers for whom the water was intended. By the later part of the 20th century the public sentiment had largely turned away from building ever more dams, and indeed toward removing some of the existing ones. The individual chapters of *Cadillac Desert* are often mesmerizing, instilling a sense of outrage in the civic and history minded reader. The chapter on the

1976 Teton Dam failure is a great example. If the leaders and promoters had thoughtfully considered the economics of the dam, or the geology of the site, the dam would never have been built in the first place. But built it was and fail it did. The spectacularly devastating failure is now used as a case study in engineering courses, providing an example of mistakes at all levels and by all of those involved. While Reisner does seem long winded at times, it is worthwhile staying with *Cadillac Desert* to the end. On one hand, it provides many interrelated perspectives on water and the West. It also ends on a somewhat positive note as the many constituencies involved seem to be converging on a more rational approach to future water usage in the West.

Absolutely fascinating. I lived in California for some 34 years and had no idea as to the history of how Los Angeles got its water, other than knowing that a good portion came from the Colorado River. This book is thoroughly researched, and deals not just with California but with the water problems and development of the entire U.S. arid West. I had no idea as to the building of the great (and then not so great) dams starting in the late 20's early 1930s, starting with Hoover Dam. Also fascinating treatment as to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the competition with the Corp. of Engineers, and the Congressional pork barrel system that fueled the building of more and more dams and water projects, necessary or not. AND one wonders what will happen as the dams eventually silt up even as the population of cities such as L.A., Phoenix, Tucson, Denver increase exponentially, as they have and continue to do. Indeed, when I moved to Calif. in 1970 the state's population was about 19 million; today it is about 38 million, DOUBLE that!! And Southern Calif. is basically an arid or at best a semi-arid desert!! This book was written in the late 1980's\early 1990's; one can only surmise how the author would be talking about the extreme Calif. drought now in its 4th year. Calif gets much of its water from 'snow-packs', from the Sierra Nevada to the Rockies (which feed the Colorado River). The CA Governor recently stood on bare ground up in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and said he should be standing on 5 feet of snow!!! Yet, as the author points out (and I observed living in So. Calif.) the only thing grown in So. Calif. is no longer orange groves, but housing developments (usually in my opinion rather noxious with their same tile roofs, and built 10 ft apart). And they are still going up by the droves on every hill and valley!! The ultimate question is where is the water going to come from to support all this, especially with the effects of climate change, now thought to be at least in part responsible for the current extreme drought??? Anyway, fascinating book (not a short read, for sure) and I learned much as to the development of California and the West. It's all about WATER!!! Harvey (p.s.: I now live back East).

Premiere lessons in Western Water. It is all a scam to take tax payer dollars and perpetuate the lies at the foundation... Trillions of dollars down the drain for unsustainable and unnecessary water infrastructure. Cadillac Desert is dated, but the corruption underlying the premises of water in the western US remains as distorted now as was then. And the wasteful practices are accelerating! The stench is prevalent from the US Gov all the way through the nice little local water district. This book is a call to mobilize, yet, the chosen path has been to keep shoveling more money on a fundamental mis-truth. Western water as it is concocted is not sustainable and the more money spend trying to prop up a broken concept is just a pipe dream.

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