

ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY AS A RESOURCE FOR WATER MANAGERS

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I. What is environmental history?

1. Environmental history is the study of human-nature interactions through time.
2. Environmental historians seek to understand the reciprocal influences of nature on humanity and of humanity on nature.
3. Environmental historians assume that neither nature nor humanity is static; both have changed, are changing, and will change, and in relation to each other.
4. Environmental historians assume that nature's patterns, processes, structures, boundaries, scales, disturbances, and contingencies affect society, and society's patterns, processes, structures, boundaries, scales, disturbances, and contingencies affect nature.
5. Environmental historians believe that ideas about nature, and the particular ways that humans organize society for manipulating nature, are crucial to understanding environmental change.
6. Environmental historians posit that technology is one of the prime mediators of society's relationship to nature, and that technology shapes, is shaped by, and is commingled with natural systems.

II. What uses does environmental history serve for water managers?

1. Virtually all people explain their present circumstances by referring to the past; environmental historians help water managers compose empirical, fact-based *narratives* or "*stories*" that explain and interpret past change and its implications for the present and future.
2. As *writers* of narrative, environmental historians help water managers convey information and ideas to the general public.
3. Environmental historians guide resource managers to useful sources of *historical evidence*, in *archives* and in published *primary and secondary sources*.
4. As *compilers and keepers* of factual information, environmental historians assist water managers in the administration and operation of *archives*.
5. Environmental historians help water managers formulate *research questions* about past and present environmental change.
6. Environmental historians assist water managers in *chronological reasoning*, or the identification of cause-and-effect relationships between past events, and help them *organize* the findings into narratives of historical change.
7. Environmental historians resist functionalist approaches that reduce explanation of historical change to one or a few variables; they are *synthesizers* who help water managers connect multiple interdependent variables in explanations of the past.
8. Environmental historians build *context*; they assist water managers in *contextual analysis*, or the study of past events in relation to numerous other historical events, processes, movements, and geographies.

9. Environmental historians are *generalists* who *collaborate* with water managers; they understand the problems of water managers, scientists, and engineers, comprehend their specialized vocabularies, and empathize with them.
10. Environmental historians provide water managers with a *critical, analytical perspective* which helps in guarding against the dangers of self-referential thinking.
11. Environmental historians convey the meaning of history in terms of *parables*, not specific policy pronouncements; they help water managers derive over-arching lessons from the past about human society and its hydraulic ambitions.
12. Of all the lessons that environmental historians bring to water managers, perhaps the most important concerns *the unpredictable, contingent nature of large-scale systems in a democracy*.

III. What are some useful guides to environmental history and its methods?

American Society for Environmental History: <http://www.aseh.net/>

Envirotech: <http://www.envirotechweb.org/what-is-envirotech/>

Public Works Historical Society: <http://www.apwa.net/about/sig/pwhs/>

Society for the History of Technology: <http://www.historyoftechnology.org/>

CSU Libraries Environmental History Research Guide:

<http://lib.colostate.edu/research/history/environmentalhistory.html>

William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative," *Journal of American History* 78 (March 1992): 1347-1376.

W. Cronon, "The Uses of Environmental History," *Environ. History Review* 17 (Fall 1993): 1-22

M. Fiege, *Irrigated Eden: The Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West* (1999)

John L. Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (2002)

Norris Hundley, *The Great Thirst: Californians and Water* (1992)

Donald C. Jackson, *Building the Ultimate Dam: John S. Eastwood and the Control of Water in the West* (1995)

Robert Kelley, *Battling the Inland Sea: American Political Culture, Public Policy, and the Sacramento Valley, 1850-1986* (1989)

Arthur McEvoy, *The Fisherman's Problem: Ecology and the Law in the California Fisheries, 1850-1980* (1986)

Richard Neustadt and E. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers* (1986)

Linda Nash, *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge* (2006)

Jared Orsi, *Hazardous Metropolis: Flooding and Urban Ecology in Los Angeles* (2004)

Donald J. Pisani, *To Reclaim a Divided West: Water, Law, and Public Policy, 1848-1902* (1992)

Donald J. Pisani, *Water and American Government: The Reclamation Bureau, National Water Policy, and the West, 1902-1935* (2002)

Donald J. Pisani, *Water, Land, and Law in the West: The Limits of Public Policy, 1850-1920* (1996)

Emily Russell, *People and the Land through Time: Linking Ecology and History* (1997)

James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: Why Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (1998)

Joseph E. Taylor III, *Making Salmon: An Environmental History of the Northwest Fisheries Crisis* (1999)

Dan Tyler, *Silver Fox of the Rockies: Delphus Carpenter and Western Water Compacts* (2003)

John Walton, *Western Times and Water Wars: State, Culture, and Rebellion in California* (1992)

Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (1995)

Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (1985)