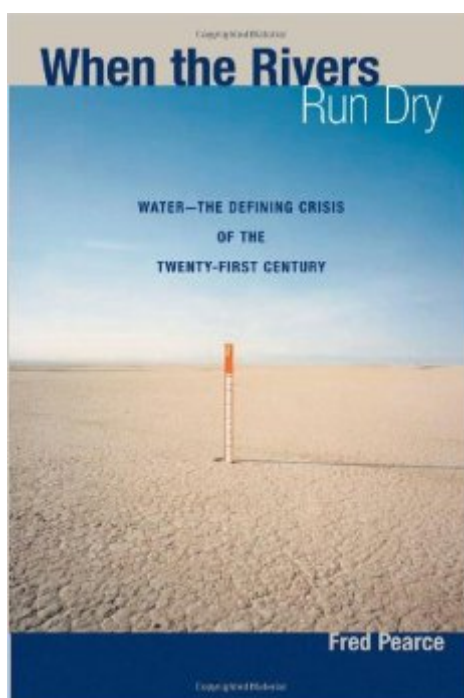


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# When The Rivers Run Dry: Water--The Defining Crisis Of The Twenty-first Century



## Synopsis

In this groundbreaking book, veteran science correspondent Fred Pearce travels to more than thirty countries to examine the current state of crucial water sources. Deftly weaving together the complicated scientific, economic, and historic dimensions of the world water crisis, he provides our most complete portrait yet of this growing danger and its ramifications for us all. Named as one of the Top 50 Sustainability Books by University of Cambridge's Programme for Sustainability Leadership and Greenleaf Publishing.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Veteran science writer Pearce (Turning Up the Heat) makes a strong and scary case that a worldwide water shortage is the most fearful looming environmental crisis. With a drumbeat of facts both horrific (thousands of wells in India and Bangladesh are poisoned by fluoride and arsenic) and fascinating (it takes 20 tons of water to make one pound of coffee), the former New Scientist news editor documents a "kind of cataclysm" already affecting many of the world's great rivers. The Rio Grande is drying up before it reaches the Gulf of Mexico; the Nile has been dammed to a trickle; reservoirs behind ill-conceived dams sacrifice millions of gallons of water to evaporation, while wetlands and floodplains downriver dry up as water flow dwindles. In India, villagers lacking access to clean water for irrigation and drinking are sinking tube wells hundreds of feet down, plundering underground supplies far faster than rainfall can replace them—the same fate facing the Ogallala aquifer of the American Midwest. The news, recounted with a scientist's

relentless accumulation of observable fact, is grim. Maps. (Mar.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

**\*Starred Review\*** From the Nile, the Congo to the Colorado, the rivers of the world are running dry. Forget oil: nations have gone to war over water rights and access in the past, and may be forced to do so again as the availability and purity of this vital resource continues to decline. Unlike fossil fuels, water is considered a renewable resource, an erroneous belief that has contributed to its abuse and misuse by superpowers and Third World countries alike. Yet as aquifers are tapped to extinction, rivers dammed to depletion, and wetlands converted to deserts, societies continue to employ the profligate water management techniques that created the current dire situations. Former New Science news editor Pearce cogently presents the alarming ways in which this ecological emergency is affecting population centers, human health, food production, wildlife habitats, and species viability. Having crisscrossed the globe to research the economic, scientific, cultural, and political causes and ramifications of this underpublicized tragedy, Pearce's powerful imagery, penetrating analyses, and passionate advocacy make this required reading for environmental proponents and civic leaders everywhere. Carol Haggas Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

When I read this book in 2008 I found it well organized and he articulately reviews not only the major rivers of the world but also wet lands and aquifers. From the perspective of 2006, when the book was finished, it is a compendium of what has gone wrong and some disturbing projections of what might happen if the global society did not address water issues. Since the original publication the western United States has slipped into a mega-drought, Sao Paulo, Brazil's largest city has almost run out of water, Syria entered a multi-year drought which some argue is the genesis of the civil war and the rise of ISIS and the United States continues to water mine the Ogallala Aquifer for water to grow corn to produce energy inefficient ethanol. As the song from the 60s notes "When Will They Ever Learn?" This is a book that demands an update 2nd edition. Many of the problems Mr. Pearce described have come to pass while others wait on the sidelines. The 4/13/15 front page headline of the NY Times is a picture of a rancid ditch that was once the mighty Rio Grande. Although this would not be surprising to anyone who read his book it appears as breaking "news" to many, not the least being elected politicians. Survival instruction talks about the rule of threes that if

not observed will result in death: 3 minutes without air, 3 days without water and 3 weeks without food. Global food stocks are at historic lows and it is easy to imagine loss of potable water leading to a loss of food and should that occur we will see a loss of social coherence. Mark Twain said it best: "Whiskey is for drinking, Water is for Fighting" and as Fred Pearce noted the battles are already underway.

This is an exceptional book. Pearce brings the skills of a good story-teller to one of the most important problems facing us all today - the planetary plumbing that provides our drinking water, our industrial capacities, and our rich agricultural bounty. If there is a central theme to this work, it is about the many and varied ways humans have taken the natural hydrology of the planet and totally mucked it up, though almost always for the best of reasons. This book, though, stands apart from other similar ones in two regards. First, the narrative is always based on personal interviews and travels he has carried out to provide the reader with a contemporary visual perspective based on first hand information. I enjoyed them tremendously - I felt like I was getting a good snapshot of hydrological issues across the globe. Secondly, his sense of history is keen; the book is replete with deep and near term historical discussions that enliven and contextualize every chapter. Indeed, this is the kind of material I would really like to be able to write, it is sharp and thorough front to back. I noted another reviewer expressed concern over the absence of citations. That is a correct concern, I would have liked more citations myself. However, for me, that in no way detracted from the very high quality of this book.

Water is the most important substance in life. Our body consists of 70% water. Without drinking water, we die after a few days. Although water seems inexhaustible, the reality is different, due to the current way in which capitalism organized agriculture. Agriculture is used primarily to produce fodder, or even worse : biofuels. Fred Pearce compares a quarter-pound hamburger with a pound of bread. The hamburger needs 11.500 liters of water in its production, whereas a pound of wheat can be produced with 500 liters water. Capitalism still thrives on the belief that the sky is the limit. In the last 50 years, in the Great Plains, a volume of groundwater was pumped up that would need 2.000 years of rainwater to replenish. Pearce focuses also on cotton. Cotton grows best in hot weather, but needs a lot of water to grow. He describes the situation in Egypt, Pakistan and what finally happened to the Aral Sea. The capitalist depletion of our precious water sources for irrigation is actually enhanced by global warming. The glaciers of the Himalaya feed seven of the greatest rivers of Asia : Ganges, Indus, Brahmaputra, Salween, Irrawaddy, Mekong and Yangtze. Two billion

people depend on those for drinking and irrigating their crops. And the glaciers are melting... The Yellow River has seen its flow diminished with 24 % in comparison to its average flow in the last decade of the 20th century. The Colorado river rises in the Rocky Mountains and cities like Denver, Phoenix, Las Vegas and Los Angeles depend on it, although there is less and less water in the river. In 2002 the flow was only 15 % of what it was a century ago. What was formerly known as a "big river", the Rio Grande, reaches the Mexican border now without a single drop of water. Fred Pearce also goes on to propose some solutions, like catching rain water. This is certainly helpful, but I think that a change in diet - to less or no meat - is more important.

Simple text describing a bunch of case studies on water issues globally.

Pearce had taken an honest and interesting view of the world water crisis. He frames the issues not simply from cultures enjoying a history of waste and inefficiency but from a geopolitical and historical view that explains current international conflict. Not all is doom and gloom in his account of world water. After all the amount of water on Earth hasn't changed, only its distribution and use. Pearce offers ideas of new technology that hold promise for the most water stricken locations in the world, but recognizes politics will play an increasing role as climate change further shifts how water is distributed across the globe.

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