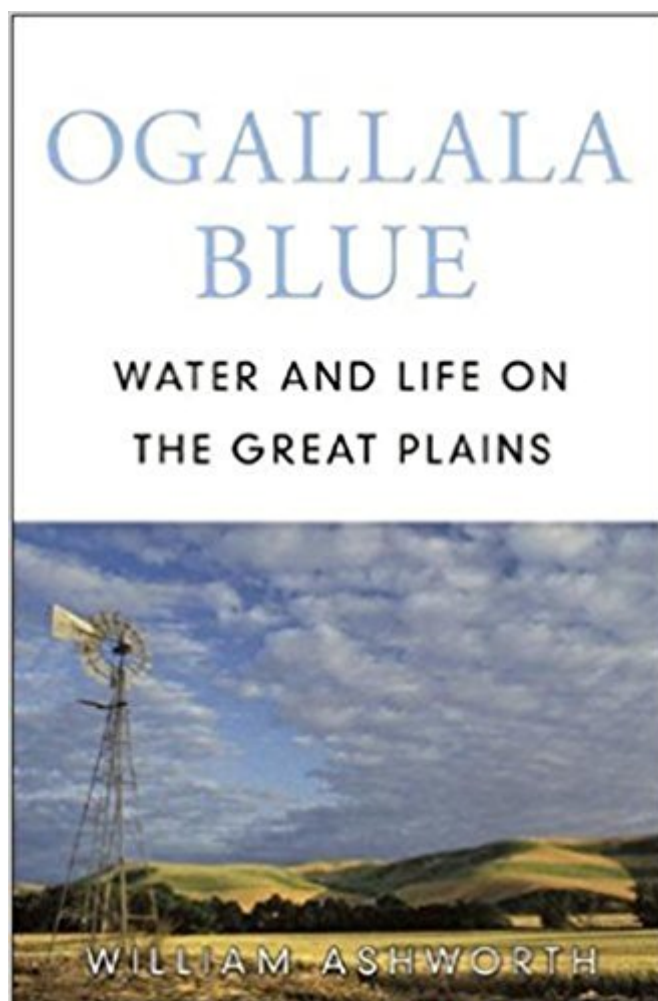


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Ogallala Blue: Water And Life On The High Plains



Synopsis

The story of a crucial, dwindling natural resource: an invisible ocean of fresh water under the Great Plains. The Ogallala aquifer contains enough water to fill Lake Erie not once but nine times over, and it stretches from Texas to South Dakota, from Colorado almost to Nebraska. Every year, five trillion gallons are pumped out for irrigation, and if the aquifer went dry (or, more accurately, when it goes dry), \$20 billion worth of food and fiber would disappear practically overnight. In this lively, carefully researched narrative, William Ashworth tells the history of the Ogallala, from its formation after the retreat of the glaciers through to its uncertain future. The most dramatic part of that history deals with efforts to exploit the hidden waters, starting with the primitive wells of long-vanished tribes, through the invention of the center-pivot sprinkler, and on to ever more sophisticated extraction technologies. This is an account of people as well as water, with many vignettes of those living in the shadow of the Ogallala's decline and ultimate demise.

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Customer Reviews

People of the Great Plains have been drawing on the underground water of the sprawling Ogallala Aquifer for centuries. But it took a failed tinkerer's single inspired invention in 1948—the center-pivot sprinkler system—to precipitate this century's looming crisis over access to potable water, on land stretching from South Dakota to Texas and from Colorado almost to Iowa. The sprinkler (followed by ever more sophisticated water extraction systems) sprayed water across fields of corn and cotton more efficiently, reports Ashworth (*The Late, Great Lakes*). But this in turn

led to an increase in land under cultivation—a situation that, compounded by suburban sprawl in the southwest, means that for the past half-century, water that had collected below the surface over many millennia is now being consumed far more quickly than nature can replenish it. Ashworth recounts some conservation efforts that could achieve a "tenuous balance" between supply and demand, but he doesn't hold out much hope that years of rampant mining of the aquifer's once-vast liquid resources can be reversed. Firsthand vignettes about efforts to introduce dryland farming techniques and reintroduce buffalo herds add some zip to the narrative, but for a doomsday book about a dire situation, the text is often pretty dry. Map. (June) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Hidden below the eight states that compose the Great Plains lies a vast ocean known as the Ogallala Aquifer. Supporting 14 million acres of crops that represent one-fifth of the country's total agricultural harvest, this primary source of groundwater affects everything from the food we eat to the clothing we wear. Deep enough to fill Lake Erie nine times over, it is immense, but it is not infinite, and this precious aquifer is going dry. It is a question of when, not if, and the management of this essential resource will be one of the most daunting challenges of the twenty-first century. Tracing the dramatic history of the aquifer from its Ice Age formation to its current precarious state, Ashworth presents a state-by-state montage of the people who have both championed its preservation and orchestrated its destruction. Ashworth deftly clarifies and personalizes the critical economic, environmental, and humanitarian issues at stake, forcefully connecting the geology of the planet's past with the ecology of this country's future. Carol Haggas Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

One of the largest aquifers in the world, is located under the Great Plains region of the US. It is a resource that could be pumped dry within a few generations, if steps are not taken to protect this valuable and life sustaining asset. The effects of pumping dry the Ogallala Aquifer, will have dramatic effects on the economic stability of Great Plains agriculture production and displace hundreds of thousands of people. The aquifer is losing its ability to replace what is being extracted, because of increasing demand for crop irrigation, spreading population growth, drought, and waste. This book is a fascinating read that lays the foundation for understanding the alarming demand of our water resources. The Great Plains has survived historic disasters, however the loss of the Ogallala Aquifer could return this important agricultural producing region back to what many early explorers referred to the Great American desert.

Had to read this for a class. Really good...not just some boring book about an aquifer. Was glad the professor made us read this because it dives into so many aspects of the Ogallala and it is really a great source of information. On the plus side, the author really knew how to capture his audience...very smooth and easy read. I definitely recommend it!

I spent my summers in the 1950's as a child on my grandmother's farm in western Kansas. I was always fascinated by the abundant water flowing out of the Caterpillar irrigation pump. It was frigidly cold on a west Kansas 100 degree day. My uncles would put a watermelon in a burlap bag and suspend it under the discharge water from the pump. The water could not have been much more than 60 degrees--or so it seemed. They used the old style irrigation method of that era: unlined ditches and irrigation tubes (first rubber, later aluminum). My older brother and I used to float down those ditches in inner tubes. So, I'm a little sentimental about the Ogallala. Still, beyond the sentimentality, the story of the Ogallala is a fascinating one. So much water, so many square miles of the high plains. It's somewhat a sad story because of so much depletion of the aquifer. But it's actually a lot more upbeat than I anticipated because of the awareness of most of the people involved in overseeing and using the Ogallala and the regulatory authorities. It seems like the great majority of people in the region know that conservation is the name of the game--while still utilizing the resource in an intelligent manner. There are exceptions, of course. The state of Texas with it's water law of he who has the biggest pump wins. In this day and age, I don't know why that doesn't surprise me. Oklahoma also sounds to be a little unsound on conservation with its water law, as well. Overall, the author has done a fine job of telling a story of geology, people, conservation, and irrigation technology blended together. I found it very informative and I learned a number of things about which I was totally unaware. I plan on giving the book to my mother for her 80th birthday.

Looking for a description of the Ogallala aquifer, which has special significance to me as a Nebraskan, I stumbled across this wonderful book. Once I started reading it, I couldn't put it down. Combining geology, hydrology, history and sociology, it reads like a novel--and yet has wonderfully specific, and at times poetic, imagery. I just wish it were available for the Kindle, as I'd love to keep it in my permanent library.

Must readings to understand the upcoming battle between the artificially propped, drought stricken, west and the Great Lakes region.

Bought this books as as reading material for a Water Leaders group that I help put together. Very well received by all attendees.

This book provides in depth information about our water use.

Husband already likes author's presentation

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