

# [***BOOK NOTE: Michael Collier, Water, Earth, and Sky: The Colorado River Basin, University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City (1999); 128pp; $ 29.95; ISBN 0-87480-598-8, hardcover.***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=analytical-materials&id=urn:contentItem:42FS-2W00-00C3-W0V5-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**[\*118]** *Water, Earth, and Sky: The* ***Colorado******River*** *Basin* ("*Water, Earth, and Sky*") offers a unique examination of one of this country's most complex and overused ***rivers***, the ***Colorado*** ***River***. Seven essays, complemented by aerial photographs of the ***Colorado***, comprise the book. Each essay focuses on a different aspect of the ***river***'s basin. From the varied native fish that survived and evolved with the ***Colorado*** system to the landscape that surrounds the ***river*** to a writer's personal impressions of the ***river***, *Water, Earth, and Sky* provides the reader with an insightful look into this majestic system. As Glen Canyon Institute President David Wegner states in the forward, the photographs and essays "explore the history of this watershed, both **[\*119]** natural and human."

Michael Collier's essay describes the ***river***'s aerial perspective. Not only has Mr. Collier spent significant time circling over every stretch in his Cessna, but also he is the book's photographer. Mr. Collier offers insights and descriptions of events that he feels impacted the ***river***. For those unfamiliar with the configuration of the ***Colorado***, this essay illustrates its intricacies and relations with other tributaries and ***rivers***. The essay portrays how the landscape, human involvement, and habitat changes have all shaped the ***river***'s current state.

John C. Schmidt, a geomorphologist, writes about the landscape that surrounds the ***Colorado***. The essay describes the "interaction between ***rivers*** and regional geology." He analyzes the concept of "uplift," how the character of rocks can alter a ***river***'s course, and a case history of the Green ***River***.

Ned Andrews, a United States Geological Survey research hydrologist, describes the nature of the basin (water and sediment origin, ancestral flows, and aridity) and how human impact, particularly diversions, affect the ***river***. Focusing primarily on Glen Canyon, Mr. Andrews describes the conflicting interests of providing water for beneficial uses, generating hydroelectric power, and elimination of natural spring flooding. The essay also provides a brief history of reservoirs and dam building on the ***river***.

Rich Valdez's essay examines the native fish of the ***Colorado***. A large portion of the fish (some 74%) are indigenous to the ***Colorado*** and cannot be found anywhere else on earth. They survive within a unique ecosystem, one that depends on unpredictable conditions and a "harmonious occurrence of many environmental factors." Archaeological records indicate that many of the species date from A.D. 1100 to 1700 and some as early as 300 B.C. and A.D. 400. Within the last 100 years however, dramatic changes greatly affected these native fish. Dam construction essentially blocked the passage of migrating squawfish and razorback suckers. State and federal agencies introduced recreational sport fish to the ***river***, resulting in disease, and space and food competition. Clear, cold water, a result of the dams, excluded native fish from certain regions and provided an ideal habitat for tailgate trout fisheries, a valued resource to fly anglers. The author points out the necessity of managing the ***river*** to accommodate all needs, including the survival of native fish.

Lawrence Stevens, a research biologist, focuses on the riparian ecosystem of the ***Colorado***. According to Mr. Stevens, the term riparian means the ecosystem's surviving in the "margins of ephemeral and perennial stream channels as well as in wet meadows, and in areas of springs, seeps, hanging gardens, and marshes," encompassing such areas as the high-elevations of the Rocky Mountains and Uinta Mountains, alpine wet meadows along the upper Green ***River*** drainage, the White ***River*** Plateau, and the ***river*** banks in the low elevations (below 6 thousand feet). The essay also explores human impacts on riparian ecosystems and concludes by questioning the balance between economic and environmental sustainability.

**[\*120]** Ellen Molloy, an author, paints a vivid image of the ***Colorado***. Depicting human's insatiable hunger and the fragile ecosystem of the ***river***, Ms. Molloy points out that "each year the ***Colorado*** Plateau menu diminishes, the diners grow more numerous and their appetite, ravenous." A solo-rafting journey down the ***river*** conjures many intimate thoughts for the writer. After almost losing the raft and her gear, Ms. Molloy reiterates what most forget, that the ***river*** is always in charge. The ***river*** humbles and forces us to look within ourselves.

The photographs in *Water, Earth, and Sky* are truly spectacular. They bring the essays to life and offer glimpses of the ***Colorado*** ***River*** that most would never be able to see. For this reason alone, the book is essential for any lover of not only the ***Colorado***, but of all ***rivers***. The ***Colorado*** ***River*** is not what is once was. To understand the changes and ways to lessen the damage, *Water, Earth, and Sky* offers a valued first step.

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