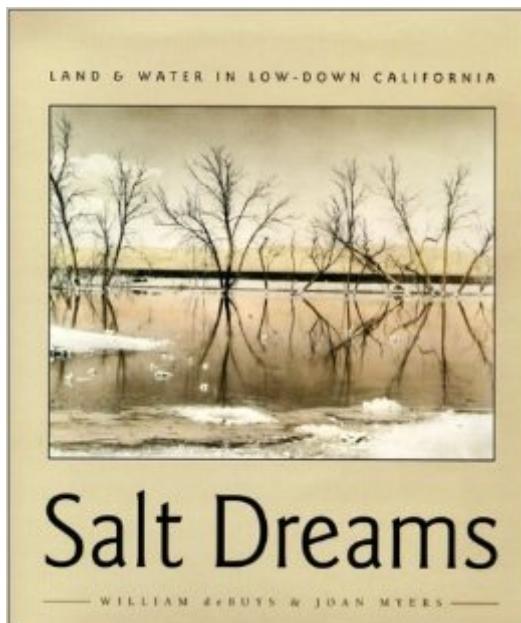


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Salt Dreams: Land And Water In Low-Down California



Synopsis

In low places consequences collect, and in all North America you cannot get much lower than the Imperial Valley of southern California, where one town, 186 feet below sea level, calls itself the Lowest Down City in the Western Hemisphere, and where the waters of the Colorado River sustain a billion-dollar agricultural industry. The consequences of that industry drain from the valley into the accidentally man-made Salton Sea, California's largest lake and a vital stopping place for migratory waterfowl. Today the Salton Sea is in desperate environmental trouble. A second river also ends in the Salton Sea. It is a river of dreams, the remains of which may be seen in the failed real estate developments that sprawl beside the sea. As the ending point of both the real Colorado and this river of dreams, the Salton Sea has become emblematic of much of the history of the American West. Its troubling story is masterfully told here in William deBuys's narrative and Joan Myers's austerely beautiful photographs. The story of Southern California is fundamentally a story about the control of nature. Beginning with the Yuman-speaking tribes encountered by the Spanish in the sixteenth century, deBuys traces the subsequent exploration and development of the region through the Gold Rush of 1849, the government-sponsored surveys that followed, and the inept tinkering with the river by an assortment of irrigation and development interests that resulted in the floods that formed the Salton Sea nearly a century ago. He introduces us to a gallery of rogues and dreamers who saw a great future for this arid wilderness but could never refrain from interference with the forces of nature. The floods that produced the Salton Sea created a vast desert oasis, but the agricultural exploitation of the region, combined with evaporation, poisoned that paradise. The stark beauty of the desert, the engineering feats that have transformed the landscape, and the eerie spectacle of Salton City and its ruined beaches and abandoned yacht club are the subject of Myers's photographs, made over a period of more than ten years. In the last section of *Salt Dreams*, deBuys acquaints us with the human and avian denizens of the region, all struggling for survival as the twentieth century draws to a close. The history of chicanery and greed recounted in deBuys's narrative and his empathy with the desert dwellers he and Myers have come to know--hardworking laborers and entrepreneurs who live on both sides of the Mexicali border, eccentrics hiding out in the Salton Desert, pelicans dying of avian botulism--are crucial to an understanding of the border issues of today and the impassioned environmental debate on whether--and how--to save the Salton Sea.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is an unusual book. Recommend to those interested in the region, in remediation, in conservation, and in the overwhelming challenges that only increase in this endless dance between humanity and nature. DeBuys illustrates so well, and quite frankly, so poetically, the true folly of human initiative, and our continual misunderstanding of both the laws of nature, and the law of the land. Myers' stark pictures in black and white capture the the dark humor of what we, as a species, continue to do to the very planet that supports us... A very unique and arresting read. Bravo.

Both informative and beautiful book about California's only sea. The history and information is nicely balanced with Myers' great photographs. Anybody interested in California beyond the cities should buy this book.

As I live in the Imperial Valley, this is a subject very dear to my heart. The history and current state of the Salton Sea is treated with respect and well researched knowledge. I would like to have seen more photographs of the region - in part to see how others view us, but also to show (as well as telling) outsiders how this place and its people are. Nevertheless this will be a very well read copy before it bequeathed - or falls apart!If you enjoy this book, you will also enjoy meeting some of the people currently here inÂ Portraits and Voices of the Salton Sea. Norm Niver, as expected, gets to be in both books!

Superlative read revealing the vast natural beauty of the desert and its inhabitants and man's irreversible errors in judging it as a fallen Eden. Together with Cadillac Desert it ranks as a

southwest water classic. Beautiful writing and stunning photographs.

I visited the Salton Sea to photograph birds and found it impossible to describe, telling friends they had to go there themselves to experience the place and the people. Now I tell them to read this book. From the creation of the Sea to the creation of Salvation Mountain, deBuys tells its colorful history in a prose that fills you with the sounds and smells and people of the Sea and Imperial Valley. Anyone with an interest in man's unlimited folly, vision, corruption, and the coming environmental train-wreck in southern California needs to read this book.

Bravo! Salt Dreams is the first of its kind to wrap up all of the issues surrounding the Salton Sea and Colorado River delta in one volume. The best since Cadillac Desert in its cinematic portrayal of a complicated host of issues. Awesome writing on the heroism of US Fish and Wildlife staff. My only criticism is that Congressman George Brown is slighted; Sonny Bono often called him "Mr. Salton Sea". Certainly, a book Mr. Brown would have loved.

Salt Dreams is a wonderful book about the history and politics behind the creation and existence of the Salton Sea. Though it is a bit off the mark in its description of the Sea's current condition, especially as it applies to Mexico. However, for those that want to learn more about "California's Greatest Resource" this book should be first on the list!

*Winner of the 1999 Western States Book Award for Creative Non-Fiction. *Winner of the 1999 Clements Prize for the Best Non-Fiction Book on Southwestern America.

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