

1-1-1999

Gene R. Reetz, Ph.D., Water Quality in the West: Report to the Western Water Policy Review Advisory Commission

Jennifer Lee

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/wlr>



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

Custom Citation

Jennifer Lee, Government Report, Gene R. Reetz, Ph.D., Water Quality in the West: Report to the Western Water Policy Review Advisory Commission, 2 U. Denv. Water L. Rev. 316 (1999).

This Government Report is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Denver Sturm College of Law at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Water Law Review by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu, dig-commons@du.edu.

GENE R. REETZ, PH.D., WATER QUALITY IN THE WEST: REPORT TO THE WESTERN WATER POLICY REVIEW ADVISORY COMMISSION, National Technical Information Service, Springfield, VA (1998); 183pp; softcover.

Water Quality in the West highlights water quality issues with a focus on federal programs. While compiled for the Western Water Policy Review Advisory Commission by the Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA"), this book will be useful for anyone looking for a big-picture overview of water problems unique to Western states.

The first few chapters cover the quality of ground, surface, drinking, and tribal waters in the West. Each chapter summarizes the relevant issue, cites major sources of contamination, and gives recommendations. For example, the use of agricultural pesticides is a major threat to drinking water quality—nitrates are the most common public and domestic well contaminates.

Those involved in Indian and tribal water issues should find the tribal water section interesting. Since Western reservations account for nearly eighty percent of all tribal lands within the continental United States and also for a large portion of the West itself, tribal water issues play a dominant role in the Western water quality picture. EPA's Indian Policy guides its work with tribal environmental organizations to overcome problems of water quality due to population increases, land use on and off reservations, and large demands on water resources.

The Sixth Chapter focuses on several different agencies' federal water quality programs. The chapter divides these programs into several categories: education/public involvement, research, planning, incentives, disincentives, prohibitions, and permitting. The disincentives section outlines agencies' arrangement and promotion of clean up efforts for contaminated sites. For example, the Department of Energy developed a clean up program for the Rocky Flats facility located between Boulder and Golden, Colorado. Some agencies, like the EPA and the Department of Agriculture, participate in most of these areas. Especially noteworthy is the Department of Defense's role in planning, disincentives, and permitting. One of their larger roles, through the Army Corps of Engineers, is permitting for dredge and fill material discharged into national waters. This permitting authority comes from the Clean Water Act. The seventh chapter follows with descriptions of federal agency relationships to state water quality programs throughout the West. Highlighted programs include the nitrate reduction initiative in the Central Platte Valley of Nebraska and the Chino Winds Demonstration Project on the problems of grazing in Arizona.

The Eighth and largest chapter of the report looks at major water quality issues separately, with each section again providing recommendations and comments on existing regulations successes and failures. Water quality issues explored include: irrigated

agriculture, livestock production, mining, hydromodification and instream flow, pesticides, forestry, and urban growth. The Colorado River salinity problem is briefly mentioned, as is municipal discharge. This chapter also looks at the effect of Total Maximum Daily Loads ("TMDL") requirements of the Clean Water Act on water quality decisions. A section on water quality monitoring examines surface and ground water monitoring, and discusses the role of the Intergovernmental Task Force on Monitoring Water Quality, and the National Environmental Monitoring Initiative.

The final chapter discusses innovations in water quality management. The watershed approach and the Wellhead Protection Program receive the most extensive coverage. The watershed approach attempts to achieve environmental improvements by joining public and private sectors to prevent point source discharges into water ways. This approach is recommended by the University of Colorado's Natural Resources Law Center because of its ability to work extra-jurisdictionally to address entire watersheds and all interested parties. The Safe Drinking Water Act created the Wellhead Protection Program, whereby each state submits to the EPA a wellhead protection plan outlining ways in which a state will identify sources of ground water contamination and implement a management plan for the area. An important part of the Wellhead Protection Program focuses on ground water and surface water interaction, and the spread of pollutants from one to the other in the "hyphoreic zone." This book explains the EPA's national and international efforts to fund, research and create possible management plans for this problem.

The report's references, an extensive bibliography and four appendices, provide starting points for anyone delving into these water quality issues. Appendix A lists all Western state nonpoint source programs. Appendix B provides an outline of the National Water-Quality Assessment Program, also available online. This program is not only an outline but also a detailed bibliography of information on Western water quality reports, articles, abstracts, and papers. Appendix C lists a summary of state ground water information for the Western region. Finally, Appendix D is a group of detailed maps of water quality concerns resulting from Western mining. In summation, this book provides the reader with thorough information on Western water quality issues and programs, while simultaneously providing encyclopedic references.

Jennifer Lee