

The Same River Twice – The Politics of Dam Removal and River Restoration by Peter Brewitt

Discussion Questions:

- 1) How did you like the overall book? Easy to read?
- 2) Did the facts and references appear reliable and well organized?
- 3) In Chapter 1, Brewitt reviews the history of dam construction in the US. Building a dam a day, every single day, since the Declaration of Independence (Bruce Babbitt), achieving the ideal of “manifest destiny” to conquer the continent. In the West, the Bureau of Reclamation supported the farmers, cities and transportation, “water impoundment won the West”. Dam construction accelerated after WWII (45,759 major dams from 1950-1979). Were you previously aware of the degree of water resources management the West has undergone?
- 4) What is the “wise use” (page 10) philosophy, and how do local communities interpret their rights to manage resources, especially in the American West?
- 5) “Prior appropriation” applies to water resources in the West - first come, first served as long as the use is deemed beneficial by the state (page 20). Contrast this to Common-law riparian rights, where people who live on waterways could use the water as long as they did not unreasonably impair downstream uses. Which seems more sustainable? Legal issues are complex. For example, the Santa Cruz River in Arizona supports an Important Bird Area, and keeping it free flowing is a complex coordinated international project that Audubon as well as many other environmentalists have joined. River issues can be international.
- 6) Dams are expensive to maintain: 85% are past useful life, and by 2020 about 27,000 will be classified as “significant” hazard potential. Most are privately owned, and marginally productive if hydroelectric in type. Did the book adequately review the challenges for dam removal?
 - a. Money – who is financially responsible?
 - b. Culture – the “frame”, the locals, the “ghosts”
 - c. Recreational lakes (impoundments) are culturally and emotionally powerful
 - d. Technical issues of silt, flooding
 - e. Fishing (recreational, small business, commercial)
- 7) The Elwha/Glines Canyon faced all these issues, from the mid 1970’s to 2011. During those 35 years, the book goes into detail about the coalitions and groups that supported and resisted dam removal. Did readers find this interesting, believable (since many may have experienced these events personally)? Were there too many details? Bias?

- 8) Several groups were lauded in the book for their tenacity and dedication to the Elwha dam removal project, including the Lower Elwha Clallam Tribe. Seattle Audubon Society, Sierra Club, and Olympic Park Associates (Conservation Interveners) joined Rick Rutz in establishing an environmental coalition and increasing awareness (page 47). Lori Bodi and Brian Winter of the National Marine Fisheries Service and in 1990 Maureen Finnerty, superintendent of Olympic National Park, joined in support. In 1992 the Elwha Act established federal involvement, promising 30 million dollars for the project. Was the credit the book gave these events balanced and accurate?
- 9) Next came resistance to Elwha dam removal from the local community and politicians (REAL and Slade Gordon) page 68. Resistance was mobilized once dam removal became a serious possibility. Without a unified coalition, progress sputtered. Were these groups and individuals accurately portrayed?
- 10) As environmental issues became more main-stream and gained political and legislative support, what made the difference for the Elwha? The Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) page 73 was able to establish respected representation of the local community. How did it do so? What lessons can be learned?
- 11) Creating and interpreting science for their own purpose has become a prevalent political tool. How is "Postnormal science" p. 33 complicating discussion of environmental restoration, and how can the scientific community respond?
- 12) What of the fish? Should more information on the fish, and hatchery controversy, been included in the book? Is there reliable data on fish recovery in the Elwha? In the nearshore? What difficulties are entailed in fish recovery data studies?
- 13) Restoration is a complex topic, since nature cannot be restored to pre-Columbian times. Invasive species, loss of native species, and climate change offer reasons why "you can't step in the same river twice" (Heraclitus) HAIR-uh-cly-tuss page 174. Restoration of natural ecosystems, not just conservation, is part of the National Audubon Society mission. Dam removal is one example of restoration, what are others in our area? More people today are employed in restoration than in logging or coal mining. Why is sustainability and resilience being emphasized in restoration efforts (page 26)?
- 14) What topics would you like to learn more about?