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Book review:
**Water is for fighting over: a compilation of articles on water
resource management in Texas**

Roper CO, Linton T. 2015. Water is for fighting over: a compilation of
articles on water resource management in Texas. Self-published.
176 p.

Reviewed by Robert E. Mace^{1*}

¹ Deputy Executive Administrator of Water Science and Conservation, Texas Water Development Board, P.O. Box 13231, Austin, Texas
78711-3231

* Corresponding author: robert.mace@twdb.texas.gov

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Future generations will surely look back at the drought that plagued Texas from 2010–2015 as historic. Not only was it the second longest statewide drought, but it resulted in record agriculture losses, record wildfires, and some harrowing months for communities struggling to meet water demands. It also sparked the long-desired creation of a funding mechanism to implement the state water plan (ironically from what is popularly called the Rainy Day Fund), a holy grail pursued since the birth of stakeholder-driven Texas water planning in 1997.

The drought also produced this little gem of a book: *Water is for fighting over: a compilation of articles on water resource management in Texas*, a highly readable collection of 64 chronologically presented short articles written by Ms. Chris O’Shea Roper and Dr. Tom Linton for the *Galveston County Daily News* and reprinted in 8 small-town newspapers across the state. Roper is a freelance writer who often writes about coastal ecological issues, and Linton is a marine biologist at Texas A&M University-Galveston.

The writer-scientist collaboration works well. The authors state that “[t]he book is intended to present both water management issues and potential solutions.” That’s an overly dry and underserving description of the book—it’s much more than that. What’s so enjoyable and fascinating about this tiny tome is its real-time diaristic nature. Little did the authors know when they began the series that the drought would continue for another 4 years, and they followed it to the bitter end, experiencing and writing about the various ups and downs of weather and water policy. Just like the movie *Titanic*, we already know the ending; the fun and fascination is experiencing the event through someone else’s eyes.

The book’s stated purpose and title suggest you may be lectured about what to do about water (especially when you see “Ph.D.” on the cover). In it I didn’t find solutions so much as discussions on the latest water conservation techniques or non-traditional water technology, such as desalination, reuse, and waterless fracking. The book is eminently friendly. It’s a one-sitting read or, if you prefer, its short essays lend it to leaving on top of the Reader’s Digest next to your dual-flush toilet.

The authors begin, in November 2011, at a Texas Water Development Board meeting to approve the 2012 State Water Plan. And the story unfolds from there. Some of the topics covered include the cost of water, subsidence, conservation, the Edwards Aquifer, the Trinity River, water planning, legislation, ownership of water, hydraulic fracturing, desalination, reuse, the Brazos River watermaster, El Paso, funding the water plan, and environmental flows. In other words, almost everything in Texas water.

Being from and writing for Galveston, the authors emphasize Galveston-area water issues; however, the authors travel the

state, check out water issues in Las Vegas, and even wind up at an international water conference in Scotland to talk about Texas water. Water issues tend to be global, so even Galveston-specific discussions are relevant to other parts of the state.

There’s some unavoidable repetition of facts, but that’s forgivable given the original format of the writings.

Interesting tidbits pepper the book’s essays, such as:

- Rice is known as the “king of the coastal prairie.”
- In 1925, the Texas Department of Health called the Trinity River a “mythological river of death.”
- Pat Mulroy allegedly said that her friends in New Orleans told her: “You are welcome to our floodwaters.”
- “Due to subsidence, erosion, and/or development, we have lost 25% of our wetlands in the last forty years. Sea grass loss is put at 80%.”

The book’s biggest failings are its financial discussions. The authors write that all federal Water Resource Development Act funding for Texas passes through the Texas Water Development Board (none of it does), that the Board has managed an evergreen bond fund since 1987 (it’s actually a bonding authority that was given to the agency in 2011), and that funding more than \$50 billion in infrastructure needs with the \$2 billion entrusted with the Board is a “mission impossible” (the \$2 billion was only intended to fund \$27 billion in infrastructure needs [those needs identified in the state water plan as needing state financing] and is being used as a reserve fund to achieve that level of financing over the next 50 years). However, the authors are certainly not the only ones thoroughly confused by what looks like a Rube Goldberg machine to non-financiers, as the State Water Implementation Fund for Texas sometimes does.

The authors attended the Texas Water Foundation’s Rainmaker Award ceremony on May 8, 2014 to honor former Texas Rep. Allan Ritter for his efforts as the chairman of the Texas House Committee on Natural Resources in funding the implementation of the state water plan. Attending and writing about this event is poetically perfect, providing one of several satisfying endpoints to the story arc of drought, its impacts, and its outcomes.

The narrative ends August 1, 2015, after the end of the statewide drought, after the 84th Texas Legislative Session, and after the authors spoke at the World Water Conference in Scotland, completing their journey of documenting for future generations one perspective on what happened during this terrible drought. Appropriately enough, the authors conclude with these words: “We are all in this together.”